Ewing
Camagni
Caselli
Çinar
Vecchio

X-MEN

Omnibus

[mutants_of__]
[___the_world]

[_arakko_]
[who_can_]
[save_the]
[_red____]
[planet__]

X-MEN

Writer: Al Ewing

S.W.O.R.D. #1-6
Artists: Valerio Schiti
with Ray-Anthony Height(#3), Bernard Chang (#3) & Nico Leon (#3)
Color Artist: Marte Gracia
Cover Art: Valerio Schiti & Marte Gracia
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

S.W.O.R.D. #7
Artist: Stefano Caselli
Color Artist: Fer Sifuentes-Sujo
Cover Art: Valerio Schiti & Marte Gracia
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

CABLE: RELOADED
Artist: Bob Quinn
Color Artist: Java Tartaglia
Cover Art: Stefano Caselli & Israel Silva
Letterer: VC's Joe Sabino

S.W.O.R.D. #8
Artist: Guiu Vilanova
Color Artist: Fer Sifuentes-Sujo
Cover Art: Valerio Schiti & Marte Gracia
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

S.W.O.R.D. #9-11
Artist: Jacopo Camagni
Color Artist: Fer Sifuentes-Sujo
Cover Art: Stefano Caselli
with Federico Blee (#9, #11) & Java Tartaglia (#10)
Special Thanks To Abigail Johnson
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

X-MEN RED #1-3, #5-7 & #9
Artist: Stefano Caselli
Color Artists: Federico Blee
with Fer Sifuentes-Sujo (#3, #7)
Cover Art: Russell Dauterman
with Matthew Wilson (#1-3, #5, #7, #9)
& Matt Hollingsworth (#6)
Letterers: VC's Ariana Maher (#1, #3, #5-7, #9)
& Cory Petit (#2)

X-MEN RED #4
Artists: Juann Cabal, Andrés Genolet
& Michael Sta. Maria
Color Artist: Federico Blee
Cover Art: Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

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[XMEN....[O] Omnibus]

X-MEN RED #8
Artist: Madibek Musibekov
Color Artist: Federico Blee
Cover Art: Russell Dauterman & Matthew Wilson
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

STORM & THE BROTHERHOOD OF MUTANTS #1
Artist: Paco Medina
Color Artist: Jay David Ramos
Cover Art: Leinil Francis Yu & Matt Milla
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

STORM & THE BROTHERHOOD OF MUTANTS #2
Artist: Andrea Di Vito
Color Artists: Jim Charalampidis & Rachelle Rosenberg
Cover Art: Leinil Francis Yu & Jesus Aburtov
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

STORM & THE BROTHERHOOD OF MUTANTS #3
Artist: Alessandro Vitti
Color Artist: Rain Beredo
Cover Art: Leinil Francis Yu & Jesus Aburtov
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

X-MEN RED #10-13
Artists: Jacopo Camagni
with Stefano Caselli (#10)
Color Artist: Federico Blee
Cover Art: Russell Dauterman & Chris Sotomayor (#10); Russell Dauterman & Matthew Wilson (#11); Stefano Caselli & Jesus Aburtov (#12-13)
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

X-Men created by Stan Lee & Jack Kirby

X-MEN: BEFORE THE FALL — THE HERALDS OF APOCALYPSE #1
Artists: Luca Pizzari, Stefano Landini & Rafael Pimentel
Color Artist: Ceci de la Cruz
Cover Art: Pepe Larraz & Marte Gracia
Letterer: VC's Travis Lanham

X-MEN RED #14-18
Artist: Yildiray Çinar
Color Artist: Federico Blee
Cover Art: Stefano Caselli & Jesus Aburtov
Letterer: VC's Ariana Maher

RESURRECTION OF MAGNETO #1-4
Artist: Luciano Vecchio
Color Artists: David Curiel
with Jesus Aburtov (#2-4)
Cover Art: Stefano Caselli & Jesus Aburtov
Letterer: VC's Joe Sabino

MARVEL'S VOICES: X-MEN #1
Artist: Gustaffo Vargas
Color Artist: Manuel Puppo
Cover Art: Bernard Chang & Marcelo Costa
Letterer: VC's Travis Lanham
Editor: Lauren Amaro
Consulting Editor: Angélique Roché

Krakoan Design:	**Tom Muller**
Associate Editors:	**Annalise Bissa & Lauren Amaro**
Editor:	**Jordan D. White**
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Sr. Manager, Digital:	**Tim Smith 3**
Digital Production:	**Meghan O'Leary**
Editor in Chief:	**C.B. Cebulski**

X-MEN

[sword_[0.0]
[sword_[0.1]

This is what comes *next*.

-- ABIGAIL BRAND

[sword_[0.X]

[kra_[0.0].....]
[koa_[0.0].....]

[00_sword_.01]

This is the *Hangar.*

You're on radar.

Trajectory is *mapped,* and... it's a clear run. Good to go.

And if I may--I'd like to be the first to offer a *welcome.*

Welcome to the *Peak,* sir.

Welcome to *S.W.O.R.D. Station One.*

[00_mutants_of_X]
[00_the_world__X]

[00_Reign]
[00___ofX]

ONE GIANT LEAP

Mutant interplanetary spy **Abigail Brand** resigned from command of **Alpha Flight,** feeling that she -- and the interstellar response force as a whole -- wasn't being properly utilized. Meanwhile, the mutant nation of **Krakoa,** as part of an epic adventure in Otherworld, liberated and repowered the abandoned **S.W.O.R.D. space station.**

Krakoa had Brand's email.

Brand had some ideas.

Welcome to the mutant space program.

STATION COMMANDER
Brand

COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE
Magneto

TECHNOLOGY/ ENGINEERING

LOGISTICS

MEDICAL/ENERGY RESOURCES

DIPLOMACY/ NEGOTIATION

SECURITY/ [redacted]

OBSERVATION/ ANALYSIS

STATION TECHNOLOGIST
Wiz-Kid

TECH TEAM

QUINTICIAN
Manifold

TELEPORT TEAM

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Fabian Cortez

MEDICAL TEAM

AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY
Frenzy

SECURITY DIRECTOR
Cable

PSIONIC ANALYST
[redacted]

Blink

Lila Cheney

Gateway

Vanisher

Amelia Voght

- ASSIGNED TO [redacted]X

AMBASSADOR IN TRAINING
Armor

GALACTIC AMBASSADOR (KREE/SKRULL)
Paibok

SUBDIRECTORS
Random
Risque

SECURITY TEAM

VISUAL ANALYST
Peeper

ANALYSIS TEAM

[00_mutants_of_X]
[00_the_world__X]

[00_00....0]
[00_00...01]

[00_unite_]
[00_____]

[00_____]

[00_____X]

Cycling air lock field one...

CENTRAL DOCKING BAY. "THE HANGAR."

...cycling air lock field *two.* Hangar access complete.

Stand *to,* everybody.

Council member on deck.

And thank you for the *welcome,* Nathan.

Did I detect a *"hope you survive the experience"...?*

Well...I'm *Director of Security,* Erik.

If you don't survive the experience, I'm pretty sure I get *fired.* So, you know...

...try not to die of old age while you're here.

I shall do my very best.

Good man. *Purpose of visit?*

Inspection on behalf of the ***Krakoan Council.*** We're excited by what you're all doing here...

So are we. Any other...

...business...?

Anyone else feel that?

Nothing *major.*

A little ***relocation work.***

"It saves on *fuel*, you understand."

You--you're conducting an inspection while moving a *thousand-ton space station* into place?

I also plan to *walk* and chew a little *gum*.

...Fine.

Don't get any scratches on it.

All *right*, Director Summers...

Back to your *duties.* I can take it from here.

Magneto.

Commander *Brand.* I'll come to you.

Speaking of-- I'm curious. You made the journey from Earth under your *own* power.

Why not take a *gate* here?

Why does a man climb a mountain?

When there's a perfectly good *ski lift?*

You tell me, Erik.

It's good to travel the *harder* road sometimes, Abigail.

After all, if we never *tested our limits...*

...we might assume we had some.

[PLog....E-7-12 11/3]
[BRAND....ABIGAIL]

ABIGAIL BRAND :: PERSONAL LOG E-7-12 11/3 :: EYES ONLY

At my desk at the Peak for the first time in... how long? Feels like years.

I've got to say, I like what they've done with the place. They've built it out a little, but the Krakoan tech means we can run the whole thing with a crew of two or three hundred. I'm envisioning a tight six-division structure, answerable directly to me. The less chance of a repeat of what happened to the old crew, the better.

At the last session, Doc Gambol asked if I feel any guilt about that. I gave him the honest answer: If I'd still been Station Commander that day, then yes, I probably would. If I'd allowed more than six thousand souls under my command to be torn apart by an inter-dimensional Vescora infection, thanks to an experiment I not only hadn't approved but wasn't even aware of -- *because of course Urquhart didn't know what science team was working on, why would he care, he was only supposed to be in charge* -- I'm sure I'd feel some kind of way about it.

I am angry that I wasn't informed. I respect secrecy, but if some passing scavs had stumbled on the dead station instead of the X-Men, the Vescora would be picking Earth out of their teeth right now. Alpha Flight needed to know, and we didn't -- another example of a wearying trend.

It was a waste of too much time trying to build that program into something while the human governments cut our funding and kept us in the dark. In fact, at this stage, I'd class Alpha as an active problem -- especially given who they appointed as my successor. Danvers was the obvious choice -- she's got the experience, she's got the contacts, she's half-Kree, and I was hoping our little set-to at the Kree/Skrull Emperor's wedding would nudge her toward taking the post when they offered it.

(The rank and file lapped it up, at least -- *drama at the feast, fortune on the field,* the old Kree saying. I can use that.)

If not Danvers, I'd have guessed Peter Corbeau, maybe even Eugene Judd. But no, the idiots managed to surprise me. They put Henry Gyrich in charge. The weasel emerges from his burrow once again -- I'm guessing he's made some friends in high places.

We'll see if I can do the same. It'll be tricky -- I've never been so good at making friends.

Making plans, though. That I can do.

[PLog....E-7-12 11/3]
[BRAND....ABIGAIL]

And here we have the *tech suite.*

How's it coming, Takeshi?

TECHNOLOGY SUITE. "THE RED ZONE."

The Krakoan *plant-tech* is bonding perfectly with the station's *original systems,* Commander. Performance increases across the board.

And my mutant name is *Wiz-Kid.*

Sticking with that, are we?

What, it's not *cool* enough? Does it not *test* well?

Is it not a marketable *brand,* Brand?

Fun fact-- *Cable* named himself after a--

Crap.

Magneto?

I--I didn't know you were coming. I knew *someone* was moving the station, but...well...

It's an honor to meet one of the architects of Krakoa in *person*, sir.

We all have our role to play. You're a *technopath*, yes?

Evidently, that extends to *Krakoa's* unique bio-technology...

Any technology. Mechanical, electronic, *plant-based*...

...*mutant-based*.

Wiz-Kid is one of the *Six*, Magneto. The *Control*.

He runs the machine.

Ah! Then the honor is *mine*, Wiz-Kid.

If I am an *architect of Krakoa*...*you* are one of the architects of Krakoa's *future*.

...

Launch is at *1300*, Takeshi. Don't be late.

Erik? If you would?

Something *wrong*, Brand?

"*Krakoa's* future"?

Isn't it?

The Six aren't as essential as the *Five*, I'll admit. But in the coming days, their contribution will change *everything*-- *for all of us.*

All of us, Erik? Or just the *magic island?*

You're part of the "magic island" *too*, Abigail...

But not *subordinate* to it. We've been *over* this.

I work *with* the Council, by mutual agreement.

I don't work for *Krakoa.*

And yet--*here I am.*

An *old man,* pushing a thousand tons of steel through a *crowded sky...* because you are *mutant.*

And so Krakoa works for *you.*

...

Look, it's not like we don't need the *help.*

S.W.O.R.D. picked the right time to *come back.* We've got a galactic economic crash that's *destroyed* the common currency.

We've got *Snarkwar*-- an unstoppable alien *war of succession* that could *destabilize* the galactic peace.

And then there's *something* roaming through space killing and eating *whole planets*--

--and all we know is *it's not Galactus.*

I could go on.

One reason I quit the *Alpha Flight Space Program* was because it didn't-- still *doesn't*--have the resources or bandwidth for problem-solving on that level.

We were always a step behind--at least compared with the *S.H.I.E.L.D. black-budget* days.

Not to mention half the time the damned *super heroes* forgot to tell us what *they* were up to...

Never a problem you'll have with *us,* Commander.

And don't think I'm not grateful, Erik.

Doing this on my own would be *harder.*

But I still have to think bigger than a *single island's* future.

For all their advances lately, mutants are still *Earthers* thinking Earther thoughts, thinking in terms of *nations.*

I'm a *Spacer.* Spacers think in *solar systems*--in worlds and stars. And S.W.O.R.D. *has to speak on that level.*

We can't only speak for Krakoa.

S.W.O.R.D. has to speak for *Sol.*

And yet...the *Peak* is staffed by ***mutants.*** This is a ***mutant space program.***

If S.W.O.R.D. speaks for Sol--who speaks for S.W.O.R.D.?

"We do."

WHAAM

DIPLOMATIC SUITE ONE. "THE STRANGER ROOM."

Cargill. Good to see you again.

I hear you're ambassador for the ***Earth*** now...

I am, sir, yes.

But it's ***"Frenzy"*** while I'm working.

Mm.

And *this* is...?

Paibok of the *Kree/Skrull Alliance.* I was giving him the *tour.*

Commander *Brand.*

Such a well-appointed holo-arena shows a keen understanding of the nuances of *ceremonial combat.*

I am *impressed.*

I will make my recommendations *accordingly.*

Then we can expect a visit from the emperor *soon?*

I...will do what is in my power. But certain *issues,* of course, *remain.*

Of course.

Issues...?

Let me translate for you, Erik.

Through their *alliance,* the Kree and the Skrulls now hold galactic power at *least* equal to the *Shi'ar.*

So... declaring the emperor's *mother-in-law* an *enemy of the state?*

Not ideal.

Ah, yes. Wanda.

The Pretender.

Ghost-mother to the Court Wizard. And an ***Avenger*** as well-- *the trusted friends, the valiant foes.*

The emperor thinks ***highly*** of her.

He considers it a ***great shame*** that you all do ***not.***

It's nearly 1300 hours.

The ***Six*** will be ***waiting.***

I'd heard tell of this master of magnetism. An Earther who bends steel with a thought...but not, it seems, *his own.*

You know him, Ambassador?

...

Once upon a time, I all but ***worshipped*** him.

"But I moved on."

Lord Magneto!

Ugh.

Sorry.

Yes... I remember the ponytail but not the name...

Fabian Cortez, lord. And how fortunate that we meet again now--in this age when all past sins are forgiven!

I wished to genuflect in person, dread lord--to offer you my most utterly sincere--

No, thank you.

...Ah...

...that is to say...

...quite right, my lord! No time for pleasantries when the launchpad awaits!

But in the future--when you're not busy--if I might speak to you about the Council's edicts regarding humans?

My lord...?

Why him, exactly?

Slim pickings, short notice. We're working on it.

Anyway--

JUMP SUITE. "THE LAUNCHPAD."

--here's where the *exciting part* happens.

From here, you can take a gate to any major city. But we're going a little *further* today.

Manifold-- how's your *team?*

Teleport crew is *prepped and ready,* Commander.

This is a *two-stage launch.*

With my *help*-- *because mutant technology is still technology*--our teleporters can *merge* their power enough to get us *where we need to be.*

Which is when things get--

Ha!

I don't believe it!

Peeper!

Long time no see, chief.

It is you! Come here!

I had no *idea* you were on the Six!

Yep. They got a use for the *eyes*, I guess.

And when I ain't doing this, I'm working with ol' *Marv* over in *Analysis.*

Ain't no *Council* gig, but...nice to be wanted, y'know?

Well, we must catch up *properly* after this, Peter. It's been *forever...*

Sure, sure. We'll grab a *beer.*

Listen, Mags, speaking of the *Council*--I got some ideas I wanna run past you folks, if that's okay...

Oh, of *course,* old friend, anytime. I've *always* valued your input, you know that...

...What is happening?

To your *station,* Mr. Cortez.

For once, you're *needed.*

Yes, yes-- without *me*, none of this *happens*, does it?

Drink of my cup, O ungrateful brethren!

'Twas shed for thee!

Yeah, yeah.

Teleporters--

--let the Wiz-Kid *work*.

Feel the *flow*.

Just like we practiced. *Like always.*

Like singing a song.

Like that.

Deadly.

...

And now...

...now it's in the lap of the gods.

MUTANT TECHNOLOGY

This has become a working umbrella term for the gathering of mutants into specific groups, or circuits, in which their complementary powers are synchronized with one another to achieve a specific goal. The earliest named example of this is probably the **FASTBALL SPECIAL** -- a combat tactic in which two mutants *[crossref :: wolv/002/02 :: clss/002/06]* coordinate their abilities to create a simple long-range attack of a type neither could have achieved on their own.

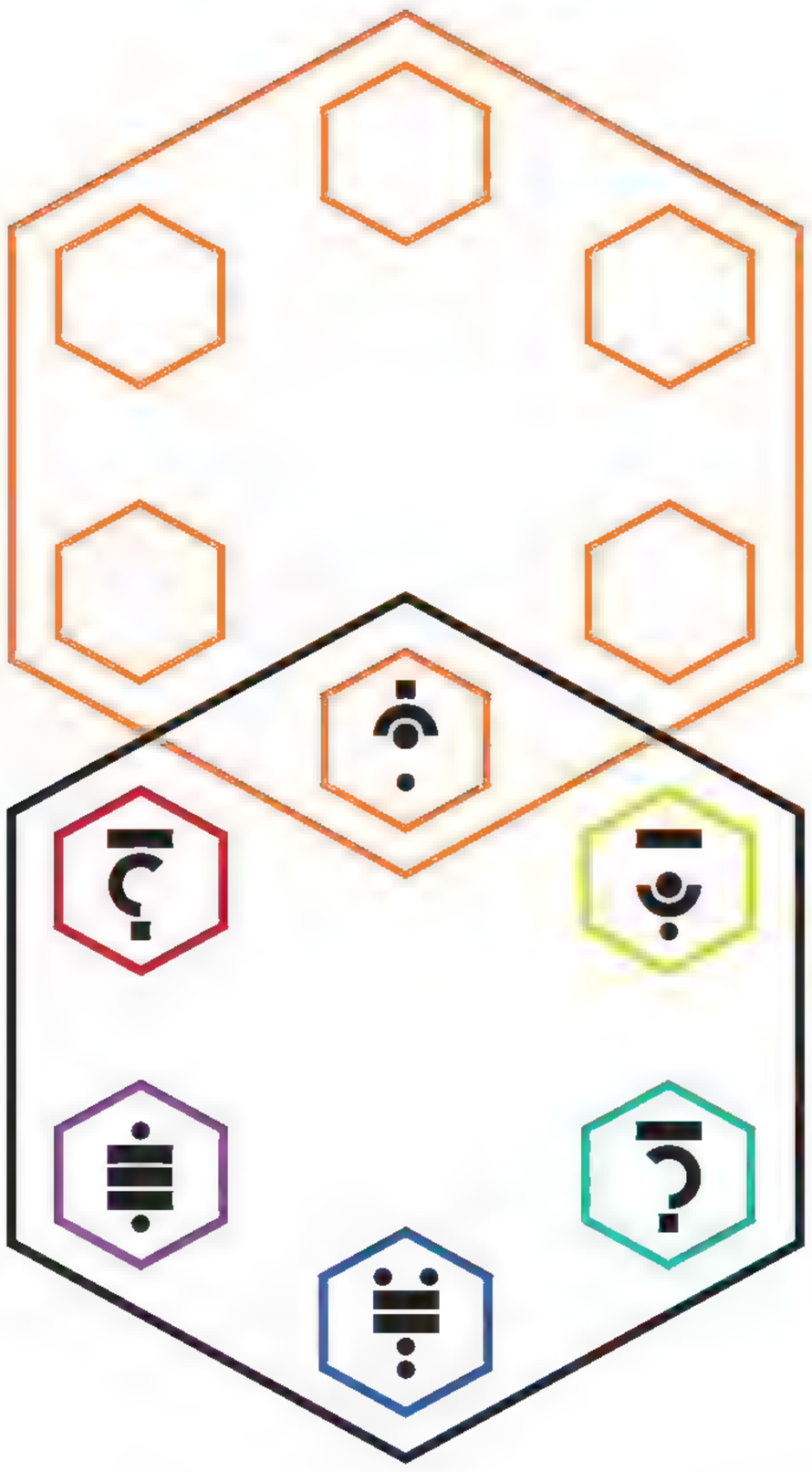
However, the best example of mutant technology as it is now understood remains **THE FIVE** -- a circuit of five mutants *[crossref :: resr/001/01]* formed specifically for the bodily resurrection of other mutants. (Though full resurrection requires a "second stage" of telepathic surgery, this can be performed by any single standard telepathic talent with access to **Cerebro** resources.)

In this light -- considering the Five as a natural evolution of the Fastball Special -- the question must be asked: given that the Five allows mutantkind an infinite timeline in which to experiment with mutant technology, what might they in turn evolve toward?

THE SIX is the first step toward answering that question.

THE SIX
[UNI/MULTIVERSAL FAR-RETRIEVAL CIRCUIT]

FIRST STAGE
[TRANSLOCATION]



SECOND STAGE
[MANIFESTATION/RETRIEVAL]

FIRST STAGE CIRCUIT

Just as the Five require one additional standard telepath for a full resurrection, the Six require a circuit of five mid-to-long range teleporters for a full retrieval. *The five currently assigned are:*

Clarice Ferguson [Blink] . . . *Lila Cheney* [No Name Given]
No Name Given *[Gateway]*
"Telford Porter" [Vanisher] . . . *Amelia Voght* [No Name Given]

(These five have been selected for ability and availability. Other teleporters will act as backup should the need arise. *[cross ref :: ntcr/002/01 :: magk/003/06]*)

SECOND STAGE CIRCUIT [THE SIX]

Designated backups listed for situations such as injury or potential retrieval of [redacted] in bulk.

THE CONTROL . . . *Takeshi Matsuya [Wiz-Kid]*::
High-level technopath with the adaptability necessary to align and adjust mutant circuits in operation.::
Backup: No Name Given *[Forge]*

THE POWER . . . *Fabian Cortez* [No Name Given]::
Energy augmenter. Provides the boost required for circuit operation inside the [redacted].::
Backup: [redacted] [No Name Given]

THE SHIELD . . . *Hisako Ichiki [Armor]*::
Generates a protective exoskeleton that, once aligned with the **Power** and the **Control**, extends to the entire circuit.::
Backup: Sally Blevins [Skids]

THE GUIDE . . . *Eden Fesi [Manifold]*::
A space-folder or "quintician," uniquely able to both navigate the [redacted] and assist in forming the [redacted] once there.::
Backup: None as yet.

THE EYE . . . *Peter Quinn [Peeper]*::
Broad-spectrum telescopic/microscopic/spectroscopic vision. Able to discern the kirbon particles that form [redacted].::
Backup: No Name Given *[Doc]*

THE FOUNDRY . . . *Gloria Muñoz [Risque]*::
Implosive field generator. Condenses [redacted] from the high-density kirbon fields found inside the [redacted].::
Backup: Shen Xorn [Zorn]

OPERATION OF BOTH CIRCUITS

Unified by the **Control,** the **First Stage Circuit** acts as a resource/anchor for the **Guide,** allowing him to translocate the entirety of the **Second Stage Circuit** while saving his energies for the retrieval work.

The **Second Stage Circuit** arrives at the staging platform constructed by previous Second-Stage Operations at the [redacted] *[cross ref :: fshr:000:00]*, and then

AND THEN.

THE POWER STRENGTHENS THE SHIELD.

THE SHIELD PROTECTS THE SIX.

THE SIX STAND AT THE SHORE.

THIS FAR SHORE. THIS FARTHEST POINT OF ALL.

AND THEN FARTHER.

FARTHER STILL.

INTO THE MYSTERY.

MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM!

ELEMENTAL COSMIC HEART!

WHITE-HOT ROOM OF SECRET FIRE!

EXCELSO PRAE OMNIBUS ALIIS!

WHO COULD STAND WITHIN THIS FLAME?

WHO COULD LOOK UPON THIS WORK?

THE POWER TOUCHES THE EYE, AND THE EYE GAZES INTO ALL.

ALL.

UNTO THE INNERMOST FIRES OF CREATION.

BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH.

IT IS NOT WHY THEY CAME TO THIS PLACE.

THE GUIDE CONCENTRATES.

THE FOUNDRY COMPRESSES.

THIS IS THE TRUTH.

THE TRUTH OF FAR PLACES-- OF THOSE WHO SEEK THE FIRE.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH JUST TO SEE IT.

WE HAVE TO BRING IT BACK.

Mysterium

1

22,000 MILES ABOVE KRAKOA.

"Here we *are*."

Do you feel that? *Ionic discharge.*

It's too soon...

Teleporters! On your *feet!* *Now!*

Focus on *Manifold!* Maintain *mental connection*--you're his *anchor!*

We don't want the *Five* today! We need you!

S.W.O.R.D. is now in a *geostationary orbit* over *Krakoa.*

You're quite welcome.

Shh.

Bring them home!

Sooo... we...

...we just broke some *laws.*

Cosmic ones...

Yeah.

I've seen *stuff,* Commander. Not seen *that* stuff before.

Came pretty near a ticket to a *golden egg...*

...but we did it. We made it *back.*

We *brought it back.*

I've checked it for radiation--nothing on any spectrum.

It's *safe*...it's even *cooled.*

You can hold it.

...

Good god.

You... you were *right,* Commander.

S.W.O.R.D. *is* the mutant space program... but *this*...what you're *building* here...

...it goes *beyond.* Beyond anything I ever *dreamed* of. It's... This is...

Yeah.

This is what comes next.

[sword_[0.0]
[sword_[0.1]

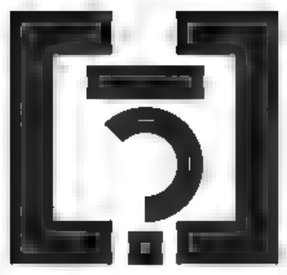
You have stolen fire from Heaven to hold in your hands. How could I object? I have done the same myself -- with one significant difference.

I wore *gloves*.

Be careful.

-- VICTOR VON DOOM

[sword_[0.X]
[sword_[0.X]



[kra_[0.0].....]
[koa_[0.0].....]

[00_sword_.01]

In the Dark

2

NEW YORK CITY.

NEW YORKER

THERE'S AN OLD JOKE.

"WHERE WAS GRANNY WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT?"

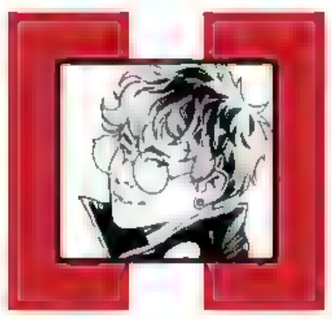
IN THE DARK.

[00__king]
[00_black]

LIQUID LATEX FROM OUTER SPACE

In a stunning display of crisis mismanagement, Earth's human heroes -- despite advance warning of the threat and the assistance of both the X-Men and the Quiet Council -- have been unable to prevent Knull, Symbiote God of the Void, from establishing dominion over the planet. All communication with Earth has now been lost.

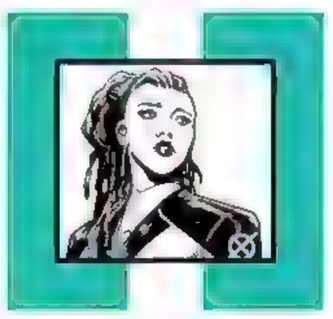
S.W.O.R.D. is attempting to clean up the mess.



Wiz-Kid

Manifold

Cortez



Frenzy

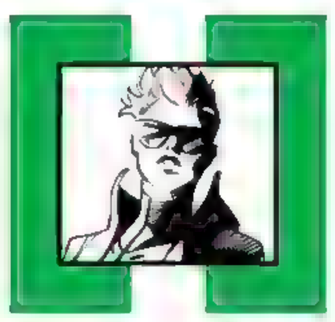
Random

Mentallo

Magneto

Paibok

Sunfire



Brand

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE. "THE PEAK."

GEOSYNCHRONOUS ORBIT ABOVE KRAKOA.

Okay. A shell of organic Klyntar material--what the *Venom symbiote* is made of--has formed around the Earth.

STATION COMMAND. "THE GREEN ROOM."

It's blocking the sun and restricting all communication. Nothing seems to breach it.

And according to Charles Xavier--*before we lost contact*--it's connected to a *god of darkness from before the dawn of time.*

So... *we have a situation.*

Give me a *full spectrum report.*

Red--Technical.

Krakoan gates are working--if I can bounce a signal through one, it'll solve the comms issue.

Do we have a *telepathic network* up yet?

Orange--Logistics.

Like Taki says, the gates are working. So's the *teleport team.*

Reckon *we're* the only way on or off planet right now...

Yellow--Medical and Energy Resources.

It's *gold.* My division color is *gold.*

I don't have anything for you.

Blue--Diplomatic.

I'm in touch with the *Galactic Council*--I'll transmit you their data on this.

Alpha Flight has yet to respond to hails.

Indigo--Security.

...

All right. *Violet--Analysis.*

Present.

What's your status, Mentallo?

Occupied.

I don't need to see that in my mind's eye, Flumm.

FANK!!!

What? I'm a *human being*, aren't I? I have *biological needs*, don't I?

If you prick me, do I not bleed? If you feed me, do I not *crap*?

Right now I'm wondering why we *do* feed you. When I brought you in, I expected *more*, Mentallo.

You're the best ***specialized telepath*** we have on station--

Oh, please.

You mean I'm the best you could get.

Don't ***sugarcoat the lily,*** Brand. I know what you *really* think of me--it comes off you in *waves*--

Change my mind.

Launchpad-- two minutes.

You've got a mission.

[PLog....E-7-14 11/20]
[Eyes.....only]

PERSONNEL NOTES :: MARVIN FLUMM/MENTALLO

ABIGAIL BRAND :: E-7-14 11/20 :: GSTC 0245

I'm letting Marvin Flumm think he's the best telepath I can get.

He's a criminal to the core. That's not some moral statement from atop my lofty high ground -- just the truth. If Flumm weren't a telepath, he'd be a con artist or a second-story man -- the mind-reading just gets him invited to a fancier class of heist. He's never cared who sends the invite, either -- he has no ideology of his own, no credo or belief beyond what puts the most zeros in the Swiss account. Which makes him deeply despicable or deeply useful, depending how cynical I feel on a given day.

To a man like that, the mutant nation is the latest in a long line of hustles. Amnesty is an easy out. Resurrection is an ace in the hole. Mutant rights are a grift, just like last time.

A man like that has no loyalty to Krakoa. In a land with no use for money, he's got an undivided loyalty to the money. So as long as I have the money -- and I do, thanks to Nick Fury's black-budget bank card -- he'll take my orders over the Quiet Council's. There's no other telepath I could say that about.

Marvin Flumm is the best telepath I could get.

(Regarding his last foray into mutant rights -- he's going to keep bringing up "the you-know-what" until Wiz-Kid builds him a new one. Leaning into the midlife crisis might get more out of him.)

—

DEEP SECRET :: ABOVE EYES ONLY

Private note: Speaking of telepathy -- all personnel currently speak English, Krakoan and Galactic Standard via telepathic download. Any other language can be learned in seconds via similar methods. That eliminates the need for translator implants -- especially the old-style beta-era implants, the ones you had to code yourself like you had nothing better to do. In these troubled economic times, you can pick up a pack of twenty for fifty creds or a fuel cell -- assuming anybody remembers them at all.

I remember. In fact, I've got one in my neck loaded up with a cypher that changes twice daily and a pack of nineteen just like it in the usual spot.

I need to start making a list of people I trust.

People who speak my language.

JUMP SUITE. "THE LAUNCHPAD."

This is a *reconnaissance mission* in *extreme circumstances.* You'll head to Krakoa, assess the situation and report back with what they *know* down there.

Then head for *New York*--that seems to be the epicenter of this thing. Link up with the X-Men assisting there.

Find out what happened to *Cable.*

Frenzy. I can't help but notice you brought a *friend.*

The void-god's rampage is ending *worlds,* Commander. Even now our ***emperor*** and ***wizard*** battle this evil--no loyal Skrull can do less.

And if the choice is between flailing against the darkness *alone* or making myself *useful alongside others...*

Paibok's a trained *Power Skrull,* Brand. And he'd be *my guest* on Krakoa--I'll take responsibility.

You have to admit, an eye-witness to mutants helping ***save the galaxy*** would cut a lot of ice with the *Kree/Skrull Alliance* right now.

That is so. The emperor is a ***big fan*** of saving galaxies.

And we do need that ice *broken...*

What the hell. ***Welcome aboard,*** Paibok. Hope you survive the *etcetera.*

You'll be using the gates for now. Once we have *comms* up, ***Manifold*** or one of his team will handle evacuation if you--

Ridiculous. We should have working comms *already.*

So there's a *goo dome* in the way--it's Matsuya's *job* to solve trifling problems like that.

What on *Earth* is he ***wasting his time*** on?

TECHNOLOGY SUITE. *"THE RED ZONE."*

Maybe a Brashear portal *inside* a Krakoan gate? Would that make for a clearer--?

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Hmm?

Ugh.

Another one?

I'm a *busy man,* latex space dragon.

Take it elsewhere.

Trifling problems.

He's a busy man, Cortez.

Well, we're all *busy*...

Yes! I for one was *extremely* busy!

And if *Xavier* and *Grey* are down there *not making a dent* in these things, I've got to ask why you want *me* down there risking *my* neck?

Whatsamatter, Marvin--you *scared?*

Of course! Obviously!

There--there are ***bad goo creatures!***

I'm a *worse* goo creature.

Good for you, Random.

I have these fragile things called *bones* in my body--

Enough, Flumm. You're not going with the others anyway.

I've got a *different* mission in mind for you.

What? *Ow!*

Oh boy! A *solo* op! *All by your lonesome!*

All right, let's go.

Putting yer big, purple helmet in the line of fire with *no backup at all*--that's some *fun times,* Marv!

Wish it was me, buddy!

...

Is it too late to go with--

Shut up, Flumm.

I'm lowering my *mental defenses* a little. Read my surface thoughts.

Look for "*Protocol V.*"

No. *No.* I mean, you-- you *wouldn't.*

It's *unthinkable--*

And yet...

I thought it.

Because *thinking the unthinkable* is what I do *every day.*

Today, we're up against a primordial ***god of darkness.*** A potentially *unstoppable* force.

According to the data Frenzy got from the Galactic Council, it's *already* murdered nearly a dozen populated worlds.

You think Earth can't be next?

I... I don't... What about the super heroes?

Heroes can fail. I have to plan for that outcome.

That's what Protocol V is-- *the plan.* The *survival of humanity* in the face of *planetary genocide.*

I'm sorry if it's a method you don't *like.*

But then, if I had *my* choice, I'd be talking to ***Cable*** about this. Instead I'm stuck with *you--the best I could get.*

Prove me wrong, Mentallo.

Get this done.

...

Fine.

But I'll need the *you-know-what.*

KRAKOA.

There'll be a *flatscan* at the root of this somewhere.

It's always the flatscans.

Snow. Without the warmth of your sun, the weather has changed *rapidly.*

I admit, it's not how I *hoped* my first visit to Krakoa would be.

The *paradise* where your mutants could finally *lay down their arms...*

Yes.

My sincere ***apologies,*** Ambassador.

I'm afraid you're not seeing us at our best.

--and this is why!

FWOOSH

A *Skrull* now? Are we *inviting* these aliens to our shores?

Then let me introduce myself!

I am called ***Sunfire--***

Burn, you foul-- *aaahh!*

So...so cold...

So dark...

Shiro!

Emma!

Mindlink with him! These creatures can possess mutants--

He's all right, Eric-- mentally speaking, anyway.

Flames protected him against it. But he's injured...

I--I can still fight--

He can't.

His legs are broken from the fall. His ribs too, where it crushed him.

If I grow some wings, I can fly up there--

I'll throw you. It's faster.

No, no. Let's not trouble our guest.

Allow me.

Shiro Yoshida, whose mutant name is *Sunfire.*

Cast off the wounds of the *body,* Shiro.

What are you...*yammering about?*

Aaaaaahh!

That--that feels--

Give me *more!*

It's the feeling of surpassing what you once were.

The *joy* that comes when the shackles you've spent your life in *fall away...*

We have no *sun* in our sky, Shiro. They have *stolen* it from us--as they've *stolen* so *many things.*

Take it *back,* Shiro.

Be the Krakoan sun.

Yes...

YES!

Still got it, Fabian.

Still the power behind the throne...

[PLog....E-7-15 11/24]
[Eyes.....only]

PERSONNEL NOTES :: FABIAN CORTEZ/*NO NAME GIVEN*

ABIGAIL BRAND :: E-7-15 11/24 :: GSTC 1078

Fabian Cortez has the exact power set required for the vital exploration and retrieval missions we're conducting in higher space. We need him on board.

Unfortunately, he's a treacherous sack of yuppie pus who'll stab any back or kiss any behind for a taste of power. I can fob him off with some meaningless title for now, but that won't salve his ambition forever, and it's possible some of the egos on the Council might fall for his shtick before I can create a long-term solution.

—

POTENTIAL REPLACEMENTS	PROBLEMS/ISSUES
Michael Nowlan/*No Name Given*	Unlike Cortez, Nowlan is unable to control the addictive nature of his power amplification. Also, Nowlan is unwilling to cooperate with Krakoan authority after learning that as a baseline human, his ex-wife **Susan Nowlan** cannot be resurrected.
Brian Dunlop/Boost	Boost amplifies powers by merging bodily with other mutants; as such, he cannot amplify more than one mutant at a time. *Note: still a very useful power. Consider for security team or* [redacted].
Absolon Mercator/Mister M	Unavailable. Whereabouts unknown.
[redacted]	Primary loyalty is most likely [redacted]. That said, she fits all other criteria, with the added bonus that [redacted] Snarkwar [redacted].

[PLog....E-7-15 11/24]
[CORT.....FAB]

THE ARBOR MAGNA HATCHERY.

Looks like someone turned the *sun* back on...

Pfft! Ah couldae done that...

We could all have done *something* to help out there.

Sure. And while we're grabbing a little extra *glory on top of glory*, who's bringing mutants back from ***death?***

The good work doesn't stop for ***space dragons,*** Eva.

A *wee baby sun* though--s'no like et's a *bother*--

It's *power.* Power you're not using to revive a *fallen mutant.*

We're ***the Five,*** Kevin-- *the bridge back to life.*

That's not a job we get to put aside--

VRRMMMM

--huh?

VRRRT

I couldn't have put it better myself.

Apologies-- I don't think we've *met*. My name is ***Mentallo,*** and *this...*

...is my ***Think Tank!***

Otherwise known as your *escape vehicle* as you leave the Earth to *die.*

Welcome, welcome, children.

Welcome to Protocol V.

Well, my lord?

Do you remember me now?

Cortez.

You've done a great service for Krakoa today. *You have our gratitude.*

I trust Sunfire won't suffer any *ill effects...?*

I've been encouraged to make my power-boosting treatments less *craveable,* sire.

But at the risk of *repeating myself*...in the future, I would like to *speak* to the Council. In regard to certain *national policy matters.*

Pertaining to the *flatscans.*

...

Yes. Yes, of course.

I think that would be *instructive.*

Oh, great.

History repeating.

Like all his *other* betrayals weren't--

OH ME.

OH MY.

LOOK WHAT I SEE THROUGH MY DEAD DRAGON'S EYE.

A FOOTSTEP AWAY. THROUGH THIS WONDERFUL DOOR...A WHOLE ISLAND OF HOSTS. THE USEFUL KIND OF HOST.

THE KIND THAT CAN DO THINGS.

THE KIND THAT CAN GET.

THINGS.

DONE.

That... that ain't possible.

OH, IT'S POSSIBLE.

DON'T ALL RUSH AT ONCE, PLEASE. FORM AN ORDERLY QUEUE.

TO ME.
MY X-MEN.

S.W.O.R.D. #2 Variant

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

Everywhere Man

3

Lila? It's *Eden.* Can you run Logistics for a bit?

I'm gonna be out of *signal range.*

Yeah, you're second in command. You're the *backup*--it's on the chart--

What, *Gates?*

He's not my *mentor,* he's a pain in the--what's he been *telling* you?

What? Well, of course he can *speak,* he's just being--look, I've gotta hang up.

You're in *charge,* okay? Okay.

What?

Where am I going?

Ah, you know. Where I always go.

Everywhere.

KATA TJUTA.

Eden!

You're dressed for it, *unna?*

Yeah, reckoned I'd check back home before work started.

And it's a ***space suit,*** Baz.

Deadly.

Glad *someone's* wrapped up warm. Strewth, middle of summer to *this*...

Sammy was saying this is all on *your* mob...

*What? **Krakoa** mob?*

Australia loves her X-Men, mate. Nah, reckon this is on yer *Avengers.*

Iron Man's a drongo. *You* tell 'im from me.

Never see him, Sam. ***King T'Challa's*** the only Avenger I see these days--

Yeah?

Didn't you say you got *kidnapped* helping him out with his big fella *space business?*

Yeah. Yeah, that was... It was ***bad,*** Baz.

They made me *forget who I was.* They made me...

...

I killed people, Baz.

I killed a lot of people.

...

Yer doin' better *now* though, right?

Yeah, Sammy.

I'm doing better now.

Hey. You *listen,* Eden Fesi. You be *careful* with Krakoa.

If they put you somewhere *dangerous* like that--

Earth's the most dangerous place today, Baz. I came to check on *you.*

You holding up? Seen any ***space dragons?***

Nah.

Aliens don't want any of *us,* mate.

Okay. Good.

Look, I gotta see a big *lizard guy* then chat with our *opposite numbers*-- then it's back to the *Peak.*

All safer than *here.* I promise.

...

I still *worry.*

I know.

You just remember what ***Gateway*** told you.

Aw, Gates is a--

He's your *elder.* You remember what he said.

You wanna go somewhere, you gotta know where you *started* from.

Yeah. I know, Uncle.

I know where I started from.

You gonna be all right without ***stars*** to guide you though? I know you get problems when you're *indoors,* mate.

And with that up there on, *everywhere's indoors...*

Not *this* where, Sam. This is where I was *born.*

We're *on country.*

See?

Don't worry about *Krakoa*, Uncle. They treat me all right. Krakoa's *okay*.

Listen-- they made up these *three laws*. Know what the *third* one is?

"Respect this sacred land."

They're okay.

...

They still had to make it a *law*...

SNARKWAR

Snarkwar is the colloquial term for a **Zn'rx War of Succession.**

Xenobiology has yet to tell us exactly how the children of a **Zn'rx regent** know instantly that the regent has died. However, the immediate reaction is always a violent urge on the part of the fallen regent's heirs to claim the vacant alpha position by any means necessary, heedless of any collateral damage caused. Though the urge can be resisted or satisfied through single combat, recent attempts at modernizing the succession process were derailed by the **Hyinar Usurpation** and the resultant rise to power of the traditionalist **Stote**, who undid many of the Bhadsha era's reforms during his brief time on the throne.

HEIRS OF EMPEROR STOTE *[ranked by odds of succession]*

Kuga of Bhoa Clan	*[25/1]*	Eldest of the current heirs. Radical modernist. Currently in retreat after a catastrophic defeat in the Ortuua System.
Wezel of Chita Clan	*[14/1]*	Traditionalist. Currently besieged at the edge of Utopian Kree space. Attempting negotiation with the Supremor for safe passage.
Khondor of Gylar Clan	*[4/1]*	Youngest of the current heirs. Moderate reformists. Currently in an agreed alliance until only they remain, whereupon the war will shift to a process of single combat.
Lyga of Gylar Clan	*[4/1]*	
Djagyar of Bhoa Clan	*[3/2]*	Radical traditionalist. Eschews a fixed power base in favor of a guerrilla fleet. Current favorite to succeed Stote on the Zn'rx throne.

"I'm surprised you could *keep* this appointment, Manifold.

"My forces have *no base*--only a shoal of *ships*, always moving. It must have been difficult to *find* us..."

DEEP SPACE. *THE FLAGSHIP OF THE ZN'AX PRINCE OJAGYAR.*

Nah, not really. You're right here.

I...suppose so. But still--*given the situation*--

You heard, then?

The Earth has fallen to Knull. Your own people broadcast the news to us.

How have they *fared* against the void-god?

We're working on it.

Your mob do a lot of *stealing powers*, right?

Snarkwar requires weapons. *Inborn* weapons are the *best* weapons--*and so we acquire them.*

I appreciate that Earth's mutants prize their inborn talents *highly* though...

Right. Depowering mutants is a ***big no-no*** on Krakoa.

So we must be *desperate*...

Matter of fact, that's *why* I kept the appointment.

Meet *Burner* and *Lifter*. They're volunteers.

Pyrokinesis, gravikinesis, increased strength and durability...

Interesting. With such weapons, I could enter the fray *personally*...

Do your volunteers understand that the transfer process can be *fatal*?

They're *hoping* for that. It'll save a lot of bother.

I'm not sure I *understand*...

You don't have to. Point *is*, these two are ready and willing if you want to take the *deal*.

And the deal *is*...?

You're the most *mobile* of the Zn'rx heirs--you don't have a base, just a *fleet*, like you said.

Everyone else is busy protecting their *planets*--you don't *have* a planet to protect.

So you could bring your *fleet* to *Earth* and help destroy the *symbiote shell* around it.

And together--*you, Krakoa and Earth*--we could *finish Knull.*

...

Tell me...

...Have you heard of the planet *Ortuua?*

A peaceful, sparsely populated world--but with vast *mineral resources* and close to a strategic *binary wormhole.*

My sister ***Kuga*** was planning to conquer it. Had she established a *staging area* and *weapons factories* there, the war would be *over* now.

But she did *not* conquer Ortuua.

Knull had already destroyed it.

Kuga had committed her troops to take a world that no longer *existed.* The error gave me a rare chance to *outflank* her.

Her losses were... ***severe.***

Now she is in *hiding,* attempting to rebuild her forces. But it *cannot be done.* Her warriors are already *deserting* her for stronger armies-- ***like mine.***

My most powerful opponent has been removed from play...

...because of ***Knull.*** Only because of Knull.

Now ask me again to destroy him.

You're not serious--Knull's a *monster*--

A monster that destroys worlds. *But I have no world.*

And my enemies do.

So let Knull come!

Let him tear the very stars apart!

I will build new stars from the wreckage--

--and my children's children will make sweet war by their light!

There will be no deal, Manifold. Now go-- the way you came.

Yeah, yeah.

I've got places to be anyway. Good luck with your *endless war*, mate.

Hope it brings you joy...

...

"Joy."

The Earther word for *Snark-war--*

Prince Djagyar?

What?

Who--?

Time to die.

THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.

THE OFFICE OF HENRY PETER GYRICH.

Gyrich? Hello?

Anyone here?

...deal properly with the *Krakoa* problem.

You think I'm *not*? Remember who you're *talking* to, Killian.

I'm *Acting Commander* of the Alpha Flight program. That includes *Gamma Flight*.

No, it's *not* the same. Even so--believe me, *I get the idea.*

PERSONNEL NOTES :: EDEN FESI/*MANIFOLD*

ABIGAIL BRAND :: E-7-12 11/05 :: GSTC 0833

Eden Fesi is not a teleporter. People treat him like one, but that's not what he is at all.

Eden Fesi talks to space.

If he tells the universe to fold itself until he can walk across it in a single step -- it does. If he tells space to warp so light passes all the way around it without ever hitting him -- to form a little bubble of invisibility just for him -- it will.

He says it's not "telling." It's "asking." It still terrifies me if I think about it for too long.

That aside, he's a really nice guy.

—

...No--no issues with the *chart*, Doctor.

The mutants are *organized* now--we need to coordinate in similar fashion.

Well, I have the *redacted* version.

Obviously, I'd like to see the *full schematic*, but I understand the need for--

Hmm?

Um...no.

No, obviously I haven't ***printed it out.***

What do you take me for?

...

Well, I'd be *lying* if I said this Knull thing wasn't a *factor*...

Unfortunately not. Without *comms*, we're completely blind.

But we have to assume the *super heroes* are going to do what they always do. ***The alternative is unthinkable.***

If the worst happens, who will the *survivors* be? *Mutants, gamma mutates*...nobody *human.*

Yes. Exactly.

Not on our watch.

PROTOCOL

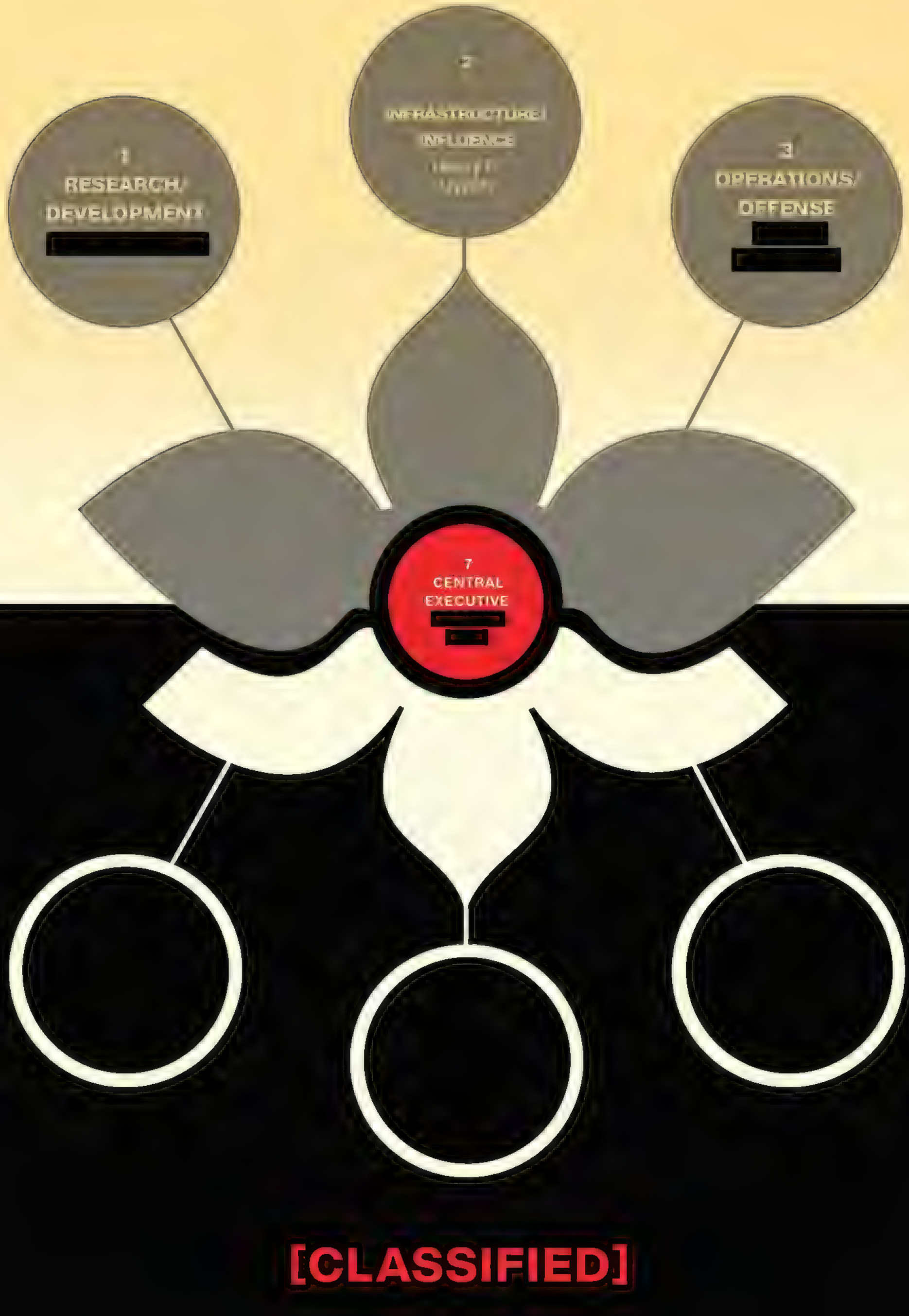
ORCHIS PROTOCOL

[redacted] **Homo superior** is statistically inevitable.

[redacted] sustained resistance [redacted]

ORCHIS is [redacted]

DIRECT STRATEGIES



[CLASSIFIED]

Crap.

...Exactly. If you *talk* about it, they call you *paranoid--but it's a race.*

Right now, *humanity is in second--* and a *distant* second at that. People are *noticing* that.

Very soon the mutants will show their hand in a big way. And then ***ORCHIS*** is going to get a lot more new recruits--

What? No. No, nothing specific.

Exactly.

My mole in *S.W.O.R.D.* only tells me *so much.*

JUMP SUITE. "THE LAUNCHPAD."

Brand! We got trouble!

Listening.

Remember that mob orbiting the *sun* with a *Sentinel head? ORCHIS?*

They got *Henry Gyrich.*

"Got" as in...?

He's *turned.* He's *with* them--I saw the org chart.

Like we didn't have *enough* problems...

Unfortunately, we *do* have enough problems. Gyrich will have to *wait.*

Comms are still *down,* and nobody's returned from Krakoa-- even to check in. *I don't like it.*

Could be they need ***extraction...***

Gotcha. Needs doing, *will be done.*

Reckon I'll just be a--

--minute.

What ***happened*** here...?

I HARPENED

S.W.O.R.D. #3 Variant

by Takeshi Miyazawa
& Ian Herring

The Krakoan Sun

4

It's dark. It's cold. Something happened.

I was on Krakoa... something stole Cable's face...and then...

Where am I?

It feels like a black hole around me, crushing in on every side. Physically and emotionally.

Endless despair. Everything feels flat. Lifeless. Hopeless.

I'm alone in the dark.

This can't hurt me. I have to remember that.

Nothing hurts me. And if something tries, I hurt it back. Hard.

I just need to know where to start. This darkness...it goes on forever.

I just need something to latch on to.

There's a buzzing in my ears.

Is someone talking?

DO YOU LIKE WHAT I'VE DONE WITH THE PLACE? ANTI-KRAKOA. MY BEAUTIFUL DARK GARDEN OF DEATH.

I DON'T HAVE FULL CONTROL JUST YET--BUT MY REACH IS SPREADING NICELY...

How'd you do it?

DID IT LOOK TOO EASY? DO YOU SUSPECT ME OF CHEATING?

I USED YOUR PRIVATE ENTRANCE, AND EVERYONE WAS SCANDALIZED. THEIR ATTENTION WAS ON ME...

...BUT MY DEAD DRAGON STILL HAD SO MUCH RAW SYMBIOTE MATERIAL FOR ME TO WORK WITH.

SO I REACHED OUT AND GAVE IT A PUSH--A FLOOD TIDE OF BEAUTIFUL BLACK ICHOR OVERTURNED THE BOARD--

--AND NOW ALL THE PIECES ARE MINE.

SO I'M SORTING THROUGH THEM AT MY LEISURE... DECIDING WHAT I WANT TO KEEP...

...AND WHAT I DON'T.

BRING ME SUNFIRE, MY PET, AND HIS IMMACULATE FRIEND. AND WAKE THEM BOTH UP FOR THIS.

"THE KRAKOAN SUN"— ISN'T THAT WHAT HE SAID?

What...?

NO, please--

--mglmmp--

SHORRD

I DON'T LIKE SUNS.

NOW.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH YOU...?

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE. "THE PEAK."

There's good news and bad news, Brand.

Talk to me.

I solved the *comms problem.* Actually, I'm mad at myself for not getting it *sooner.*

We don't *need* to send a signal through a Krakoan gate--because *the signal is the gate.*

To make the gate *work,* the start point has to talk to the end point--*a piece of Krakoa* talking to *a piece of Krakoa.*

I can send *information* through that connection--even convince Krakoa to grow *radio transmitters* on the far gates--*but--*

But you already *did it.* And nothing.

We should be hearing from someone *down there*--if we're *not,* and the connection isn't the issue--

--then that means *trouble,* Commander. *Permission to take a closer look?*

I need you where you'll do the *most good,* Wiz-Kid.

But let's try my ace in the hole.

This is Brand calling Mentallo--

THE *ARBOR MAGNA* HATCHERY.

--if you're there, *pick up.*

Commander! It's not my fault!

Well, *that's* encouraging.

I tried to explain the protocol-- *I swear--*

But it, uh, didn't go well--

Is that *Commander Brand?*

Put me on.

Hnntt--

Is what I'm seeing in this mind *legitimate?* This kidnap attempt is on *YOU?*

It's not a *kidnapping,* Summers. It's an attempt to ensure the *survival of humankind.*

Or *mutantkind.* You're all Earthers to *me.*

Give me the fine details.

Mentallo escorts you to the *Summer House* on the Moon. You take their ***Cerebro*** cradle--*the mind bank*--to *Shi'ar space.*

Strike one.

DNA samples will be brought to you. Not *all* of them--

Strike two.

--but enough to eliminate *inbreeding* and other risks. Then, if human life is ***wiped out,*** *you do what you do*--and bring it *back.*

Mentallo can perform the necessary *telepathic surgery*--

And ***that's strike three.***

Really? He's good enough to bring back ***Xavier,*** at least...

Please. That's like using a *car wash* to restore the ***Mona Lisa.***

I'm right here.

And your safe harbor is *Shi'ar territory?* How many Shi'ar colonies fell to goo dragons *this week?*

Four. And counting.

We're all still reeling from losing ***Rockslide*** and ***Gorgon,*** and now you want to lose *millions more?*

Fine. I get it--you don't want to *run from the fight*--

And using only *part* of Sinister's DNA bank--that's just *grotesque.*

The Five's reason for being is to *bring every mutant back.*

You're *projecting.*

Establishing *backup hatcheries* in secure locations is a *great* idea. I'm all for it.

But doing it on the *fly,* during a *universal crisis*...that's just ***stupid.***

Things don't always happen on our *schedule--*

You saw ahead enough to *plan* all this. You just didn't run it past anyone *here.*

You say we're all *Earthers* to you--like *you're* so enlightened--

--but all I see from you is the *same old* ***human thinking!***

*Spycraft and machinations, secrets and mysteries-- **who does it serve?***

Well, I don't blindly serve ***Krakoa.*** And some things *are* need-to-know.

I've got my reasons.

I do.

Do you? Because I think you just like *games* the way Mentallo likes *toys.*

I mean, who needs a *giant tank* for an ***extraction mission?***

I built a *translocator* into the chair and a *receiver* into the *Think Tank*. Human tech has its uses.

Wiz-Kid...?

Where I'll do the most *good*.

You can *teleport?*

I'd have come via *Krakoan* gate--much less *effort*--

--but I suspect Krakoa's *compromised*.

Holy crap!

Protect the pods--

No need to endanger yourselves.

This is what the Think Tank's *for*.

You're driving it?

But it's my *baby*...

Sorry, Mentallo...

VRRRP

KRRR

PHT

VRRKRKRRR

...but your baby's all grown up.

THE EVERYWHERE MAN. ONE-OF-A-KIND SPACE MANIPULATOR AND UNIVERSAL TELEPORTER.

AND YET... NOT AN OMEGA. DOESN'T THAT WORRY YOU, EDEN?

THAT SOMEWHERE, THERE'S SOMEONE MORE?

WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO WITH THE MAN-I-FOLD?

I CAN THINK OF LOTS OF THINGS. YOU'RE A USEFUL KINDA GUY, EDEN FESI.

Not really thought about it.

HSSSS

OUCH! CAN'T TOUCH THIS! LOOKS LIKE WE'RE AT AN IMPASSE, EDEN. A STALEMATE.

Nah. You don't believe that.

And neither do I. You're going on a little *trip*, Knull.

Say hello to the center of the Sun.

I THINK NOT.

BODYSLIDE~

~BY ONE.

ISN'T TELEPORTATION WONDERFUL?

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT!

HA!

THAT'S RIGHT. YOU CAN'T GO TOO FAR—I HAVE AN ISLAND FOR A HOSTAGE. AND UNLIKE ME, YOU ARE MORTAL...AND MUST TIRE...

...SO RUN IN YOUR CIRCLES, RABBIT.

YOU'LL TASTE BETTER FOR IT!

BODYSLIDE!

I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU, EDEN!

Someone's talking.

BODYSLIDE!

Pinpoint the sound.

HA!

Unngh--

Close.

BODYSLIDE!

TOO SLOW! AND

--BODYSLIDE!

Closer...

DOWN!

Uff--

DEAR, DEAR. NEXT TO THIS BODY, YOU'RE NO FIGHTER.

OR MUCH OF A TELEPORTER.

I DON'T THINK YOU'RE WORTH KEEPING, EDEN...

There you are.

Right there.

SHOP

WHAT—?

All in one motion.

Disarm him.

In every sense.

WRRUNCH

EEAAAH!

The arm has the tech. No more bodysliding for you.

YOU— YOU—

I'LL MAKE YOU KILL EVERYONE YOU LOVE— BEAT YOUR OWN CHILDREN TO DEATH—

I've only ever loved *one person.*

And if he'd felt the same, *you'd* be my *stepson.*

So this must feel like a win.

KRAKK

Figured one of you had to be playing possum. Glad it was *you,* Jo.

So anyway-- *now that I've got a moment to breathe...*

...I don't teleport. I'm more than that.

I talk to the universe...

...and we get along, so she does me little favors.

Like catch a piece of the sun--move it from there to here--

--and wrap it in a bubble of folded space so it doesn't hurt anyone.

NO--

Anyone I don't want it to.

You don't like suns? That's a shame--

--'cos the universe gave me this one as a gift!

Take a closer look!

WAAARRGHH!

Unnhh...

Yeah.

And I'm not even an Omega mutant. Somewhere... there's someone more.

So maybe don't come back.

I'm seeing sunlight!

What?

I said I'm seeing sunlight! Sun-light!

What?

Yeah--

--symbiote activity's died right down.

So we can probably stop with the *lights* and the *noise*.

Wan mair song! Wan mair song!

Okay-- one more--

Yeah! Mutant techno party tonight!

That is, if you guys want to get back to work *right* away...

Now he's borrowing my records.

It's not fair.

It's not fair.

This keeps *happening*... I'm never...never good enough...

When will I be good enough?

This creature took your ***father,*** Nathan.

It took ***all of us here*** without effort. If there is a common factor there, it's not *deficiency of talent.*

So let's refrain from blaming ourselves for the acts of our *oppressors,* shall we?

What's our *next move, sir?*

Krakoa has fought off alien invasions before. In the end, this will be no different.

Contact the *Five.* Move ***Sunfire*** to the front of the resurrection queue *with immediate effect.*

Then mutants with proven *anti-symbiote* abilities-- *fire, electricity, light.*

Manifold will guard the gate until then.

Well--if *Brand* says so-- yeah, okay--

Take it as read.

And then... *after this is over...*

...tell the Five to resurrect Fabian Cortez.

He and I have matters to discuss.

THE QUIET COUNCIL OF KRAKOA

RE: MEETING REQUEST :: EARLIEST CONVENIENCE :: MAGNETO

As requested, there will be a Council meeting at [redacted] on the [redacted]th of [redacted] for the purposes of discussing the second law of mutantdom and potential amendments thereto.

As certain members of the Quiet Council are unable to attend, the matter will be debated by a quorum of eight, with any binding resolutions to be brought before the full Council at such time as all twelve are in attendance.

In addition, there will be three guests in attendance [Fabian Cortez, [redacted] and [redacted]] -- and, as always, *Krakoa will be listening.*

—

Erik -

While there's no technical reason not to grant your request for this meeting, I strongly urge you to reconsider.

It's playing with fire, old friend.

Charles

DEEP SECRET :: EYES ONLY :: DO NOT UNREDACT :: UTILIZE FULL TELEPATHIC SAFEGUARDS ::

[DE. .[ep]__OX]
[SEC .[ret]_04]

++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] VOGHT ++
++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] / [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] / [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] / [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] / [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] / [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] SNARKWAR [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] ++
++ [redacted] SOL [redacted] ++

[B_[urn]ING....[0]
[HE___[art]....[4]

S ONLY :: EYES ONLY :: EYES ONLY :: EYES ONLY :: EYES

S.W.O.R.D. #4 Variant

by Matteo Scalera
& Moreno Dinisio

Giallo

5

WE-PLEX SUPREME INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM ACTIVE

18th Kree Diplomatic Gestalt // Reality 616 // Utopia Protocols Engaged

Self-Identification Loop // SYSTEM IS

- delusions inexhaustible — *end them all*
- gates of creation manifold — *open them all*
- sentient beings numberless — *save them all*
- utopian kree way supreme — *complete it*

CRISIS PROTOCOLS ENGAGED

- KNULL NEUTRALIZED
- OLYMPIAN GODS NEUTRALIZED
- KREE IMPERIUM CRISIS INACTIVE
- KORVAC APOTHEOSIS AWAITING DATA
- SNARKWAR CRISIS ACTIVE

U-KREE COLONY J-453 OVERTAKEN BY ZN'RX FORCES

CALCULATING RESPONSE

REQUEST DATA?

COLONIST EVACUATION DATA

593 sentients evacuated

// save them all 98.83% success in current instance

OPPOSING FORCE DATA

commanded by WEZEL of CHITA CLAN

combat strength 64.22% of U-Kree max combat strength

ODDS OF SUCCESSFULLY RETAKING COLONY

79.1% with 38% casualty rate

casualty rate unacceptable

ODDS OF FURTHER SUCCESSFUL INCURSION BY ZN'RX FORCES

2.22% with current defenses

STRATEGY CALCULATED

ENGAGE SIEGE PROTOCOL

UPDATE // NEW DATA

SIEGE PROTOCOL RESULT

- incursion attempts 8
- successful incursions 0
- RECENT INCURSIONS 0
- *end them all* 100% success in current instance

UPDATE /// NEW DATA

Wezel is requesting safe passage through U-Kree space

ALLOW // Y / N?

PLANT J-453. AT THE EDGE OF UTOPIAN KREE SPACE.
UNDER OCCUPATION BY WEZEL OF CHITA CLAN.

I am *sorry,* Prince Wezel.

It is simply not *convenient* for you to move your armies through our space at this time.

Ridiculous! Preposterous! I am under siege!

Trapped on this stinking backwater--*fenced in* by my duplicitous half-siblings on every side but *yours!*

A sitting duck!

Most unfortunate. But the Utopian Kree *cannot* be seen to take a side in the Zn'rx conflict.

Then you're siding *against me!* And it won't be forgotten! *My vengeance will be exquisite!*

Sleep lightly, blob!

Keep one eye open!

I'll remind you that *your forces* ran our colonists off that "backwater" in the first place...

So? Aren't you the ***Utopian*** Kree? ***Turn the other cheek!***

*"Sentient beings are numberless--we vow to save them all!" **Pah!** Save **me**,* then, you hypocritical ***mucus!***

Am ***I*** not sentient? Hmm? ***Is my very life not in--***

--danger--

...

You make a *convincing argument.*

Murder.

Specifically... murder by **alien symbiote.**

That was the *cause of death,* if you were wondering.

I...I was *dead...?*

This time for real. I drew the short straw and put your *mind* back, by the way.

It didn't take long.

Yes...yes, *of course.* Eternal life is the *birthright* of every mutant.

And now...comes the ***ceremony.***

The *re-affirmation.*

The ***crowds,*** *shouting my--*

We're not having one of those today.

You have *Council business*--that takes priority.

You should have seen *Sunfire's ceremony* though.

That was a party.

...

Do I get *clothes?* A *shower,* at least? I'm covered in *yolk...*

It does get everywhere.

My advice? Try to scrape it off before it goes *crusty.*

Come on.

Let's not keep the Council ***waiting.***

Ah, Fabian. *The man of the hour.*

Wait there, please.

We don't have a *complete* Council today, but we have enough for a *quorum*, I believe.

You called the meeting, Erik--are you satisfied?

I think we'll need a couple more. But I have ***guests*** on the way...

...Ah. Speak of the wind, and in it blows. You all know *Abigail Brand?*

I'm just here in an *advisory capacity,* obviously.

And I brought the *analyst* you requested...

No.

Hey, folks.

Peeper. Take a *seat,* old friend. How are things?

Busy, busy, Mags-- lots of work for the ***Six*** right now, you know?

Hey, Fabes. Lookin' sharp.

Why is he here--?

Because I value his *input.* Peter is--*if you'll pardon the pun*--quite the man of ***vision.***

As well as being one of my oldest *and most* ***trusted*** *friends...*

Magneto... ten minutes ago, I was *dead.*

I am now in an important meeting with *no clothes on.*

Two of man's *greatest nightmares,* in quick succession. Am I being ***punished...?***

Are your *grand plans* not going as imagined? That's nothing *new,* surely?

This is your opportunity, Cortez. ***Here and now.***

You have the floor.

Speak.

Or ***leave.***

...

Well, then.

If I have your *full attention,* ladies and gentlemen of the Quiet Council...

...I would like to discuss the subject of ***murder.***

XAXOXO. A TECHNO-FEUDAL SOCIETY AFFILIATED WITH THE GALACTIC RIM COLLECTIVE.

UNDER OCCUPATION BY KHONDOR AND LYGA OF THE GYLAR CLAN.

It's *murder.*

First, our half brother ***Djagyar*** was killed. His throat *slit* in the private quarters of his *own flagship.*

And now the same has happened to our *other* half brother-- ***Prince Wezel*** of ***Chita Clan.***

The kill is verified. Someone is using *assassination tactics,* Khondor.

The *War of Succession,* please.

"Snarkwar" is a vulgar colloquialism.

Perhaps. But it is that word the galaxy *knows...* and *fears.* Which makes it a ***weapon.***

The tactics aren't important, Lyga.

Outside this room, ***Kuga*** of ***Bhoa Clan*** is the emperor's *last living heir.* Once we have word of her *death,* the ***Snarkwar*** will be just between *us.*

And in *Snarkwar,* ***no weapon is forbidden.***

All the more reason to do away with Snarkwar *entirely.*

Succession should be decided by ***single combat***-- heir against heir in a *legitimate arena.*

How can we call ourselves royalty if we *skulk* and *strike from the dark?* With *paid assassins?*

Such an *accusing* tone...

Please, brother. You said yourself--*you don't think tactics are important.*

And you weren't *surprised* by Wezel's death...

BIP

I was surprised my people used a *blade.* I told them to strike from *afar.*

You see? ***No honor.*** *That's* the difference between us, brother.

VRRT

Well, I was always the *practical* one, Lyga.

And I don't *entirely* disagree...

...some things *should* be ***up close and personal...***

Don't take this *personally.* But *with the greatest respect--* the second law is ***backwards.***

You've made it a rule to "*murder no flatscan,*" when--

Let's not use *that word,* Fabian.

Not here.

Of course.

Our oppressors may denigrate *us--*humiliate us, *strip us of who we are--*

--but unless we *consider their feelings,* we are the true monsters.

Please, *Charles.*

I've heard it all before.

Oh?

Have you?

Have *I not?*

Am I not mutant?

Have I not heard *all* their arguments for my own ***extinction?***

And yet, even now. *Even now.*

I do not mean them ill.

I have no desire to treat *them* as they have treated *us.*

Or *as they treat themselves.*

This is a *new day*-- and as I have been *forgiven, so shall I forgive.*

But tell me...

...why must I *bow?*

Why is the highest *mutant* crime a crime against *humans?*

Ah-- I remember. Because they are *finite.*

Because we have no resurrection protocols for *them.*

And in that case...well, we're *already* refusing to save the poor creatures from *what must come.*

Their slow, painful decline. *Their inexorable death.*

Be they enemies or allies--*or our own family*--

--we are *allowing* that horror.

Again-- I do not say this out of *malice.*

To take a human life--*in the course of our business*--should be a *regrettable thing.*

How is it *murder* though?

How can it be murder if they're already dead?

THUKK

Khondor--

He was going to kill you.

You must have seen that *coming*, surely? Someone who *doesn't believe in honor?*

He all but *confessed* it.

...

He was my *brother.* And until now, his word was good.

Who are *you*, stranger? Why would an Earther sneak in here to *save my life?*

Amelia Voght. I'm just the *transport.*

So I *didn't* save your life, Lyga of the Gylar clan.

I didn't save it at all.

I'm sorry.

SHLICK

No-- wait--

Your forces took this world for a *staging post* and *massacred* half the souls on it. That shows *strength.*

Don't betray that strength with *begging.*

Your line ends here, Gylar clan. Your *name* ends here.

Let it end well.

Well?
Nothing to say?
...
What's your *mutant* name?
Eh?
I'm *Peeper*, Mags is *Magneto*, Marv is *Mentallo*.
Mutant names. What's *yours*?
I don't need some tawdry alias, "*Peeper*."
I am ***Cortez***.
I mean... they *started* as work names. Or *call signs* or whatever.
But they're our *culture* now. Nobody's picking them to ***hide behind***, y'know?
You pick your name to say who you *are*.
So who are *you*?
...
I am ***Cortez***.

My forefathers were *ancient nobility* in Europe--and men of *wealth* in the new world.

We bent continents to our whim.

And my sister and I were *mutant*...the *pinnacle* of the bloodline...

But we were *shunned* by the sapiens in our family.

Treated as ***embarrassments.***

Handed a *pittance*. The *scraps* from the family table.

Barely *six figures*... property in *Florida*...

But I ***am*** Cortez.

My name is a *mutant name*, because it ***belongs to me.***

And if the flatscans want it *back*...

...they can wear it on their tombstones.

Yeah.

See, I figured it was something like that.

You've raised some interesting... *nuances*, Mr. Cortez.

Issues of *manslaughter* or *negligence* should perhaps be *considered*.

But *that* is for another day and a full Council.

Today is for *murder*...

...and *I know* murder.

Murder, in the simplest terms, is a ***choice***.

I have made that choice *many times*. In the passion of an instant--*and at cold, calculated length*.

But such choices were made in a time *long past*. We are *here*, and it is *now*.

If I were to make that choice again--*for any reason*--I would face ***exile***. And face it ***gladly***--for we *must be* a nation of laws.

I've listened to how you have... *suffered* at human hands. To *your* reasons.

Do me *one favor*, Cortez.

Look me in the eye...

...and tell me they are greater than mine.

I...

...I should have special dispensation.

Erik--

--this is getting ridiculous. We have the Gala to prepare for.

Motion to dismiss this meeting--

No! I'm not done!

You need me, Storm! I-- I am vital to your space program!

I am vital to Krakoan society!

Love it.

Without me, there are no more expeditions to higher space!

None of your precious Mysterium--

--and don't think I don't know what that's for!

What it will bring us!

Fabian, this is beneath you--

No!

I am your future, Krakoa!

And I want the respect due me, or... or I'll...

...Who are you?

I'm surprised you don't *remember* me, Fabian.

We're such old friends.

He means *me.*

I am *Khora of the Burning Heart,* little small man.

I am fire in the soul, and I am *murder in the dark.* I am of *Arakko.*

And I am your *replacement.*

Brian Dunlop/Boost

Boost amplifies powers by
other mutants; as such, he cannot amplify
than one mutant at a time. *Note: still a very useful power. Consider for security team or deniable ops.*

Absolon Mercator/Mister M

Unavailable. Whereabouts unknown.

Khora of the Burning Heart

Primary loyalty is most likely to Arako. That said, she fits all other criteria, with the added bonus that her skill set as an assassin will assist us in ending the current Snarkwar by taking out all heirs to the throne, bar our chosen candidate.

[PLog E-7-15 11/24]
[CORT . FAB]

++ MISSION ASSETS AS FOLLOWS
++ KHORA OF THE BURNING HEART
++ AMELIA VOGHT

++ MISSION DETAILS AS FOLLOWS
++ LOCATE AND DESTROY:
++ DJAGYAR / BHOA CLAN
++ WEZEL / CHITA CLAN
++ LYGA / GYLAR CLAN
++ KHONDOR / GYLAR CLAN
++ PROTECT AND DEFEND:
KUGA / BHOA CLAN

++ MISSION OBJECTIVE AS FOLLOWS
++ END SNARKWAR WITH RADICAL
++ MODERNIST FACTION IN CONTRO
++ AND INDEBTED TO SOL SYSTE

[PLog E-8-7 01/19]
[Eyes. only]

PERSONNEL NOTES
KHORA OF THE BURNING HEART :: EYES ONLY

ABIGAIL BRAND :: E-8-7 01/19 :: GSTC 0527

She's called that because her heart literally burns in her chest, a furnace in her rib cage. The flame is her life force -- if she keeps it to herself, it makes her stronger, faster and more dangerous in combat than any ten trained soldiers I know, and I've known plenty. But the interesting thing is -- she can share it out, fill anyone close to her with the same burning energy she's got, and, in so doing, boost their power level far above normal. It's an ability she's barely used -- on Arakko, it'd be an insult to even suggest anyone needed that kind of boost. But frankly, it's the answer to my prayers.

Because Fabian Cortez can't be trusted, and somebody has to replace him.

Khora is loyal to Arakko above all, but right now Arakko's goals are

My what...?

Mission complete?

Kuga of Bhoa Clan is the new Zn'rx empress. She knows she owes that favor to Krakoa.

And to Arakko...

Of course.

I assume we're *done* here? I have *work* to do.

We all do.

Next time you want to teach an upstart his *lesson*, Erik, do it on your *own* time.

I think it was right to give him the *chance* to make his case...

I--I--

Thanks for *indulging* me, Charles.

Heading back to the *station*, Abigail? May I join you?

Amelia. You know, I don't think we've spoken since you *arrived* here...

We've *both* been busy, Charles.

But if there's nobody *else* demanding your time...?

Oh, no.

Nobody important.

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE.
THE PEAK.

I suppose most mutants don't *know* how Zn'rx pick their rulers.

Still...I'm a *little* surprised no one thought to ask the *obvious question,* Abigail.

"Murder no human." Does that law apply only to *Homo sapiens?* Is alien life less *important?*

Or do you and your new *asset* belong in the *hole?*

That depends. *Is it murder in defense of a nation?*

Or a *planet?* Or a *thousand* planets?

Snarkwar destroyed my father's *homeworld.* Dad was one of the only people who *escaped*-- and it left him *broken.*

One more *galactic drifter,* hustling for his next drink.

So *yes,* Magneto-- I *ended* the latest war of succession the cleanest way I could.

By picking the winner.

In defense of *Sol?* Or as justice for the *past?*

Some would call *either* a good reason...

...some will not.

Be *careful,* Abigail.

Duly noted. It's a fairly *blunt* way of influencing galactic society, I'll admit.

But *fortunately for us...*

...we now have something better.

This Is What Comes Next

6

1:10 A.M.
AFTER THE FIREWORKS.

...can't believe they'd just... *do that...*

Maybe it's time to stop thinking of them as your *friends*, Mr. Hudson.

These X-Men represent a ***rogue nation.*** One that just showed how far they'll go to *take our place* as Earth's dominant species.

I don't know *what* to think. It's... the *power* it took, and they...they just...at a ***fashion event...***

It's too *big*, Gyrich.

It's too big.

I'm right there with you.

James--I'd like you to *meet* some people. Tell me...

...have you heard of a thing called *ORCHIS?*

Captain.

Your *thoughts?*

...

That's a ***big question,*** Doctor.

I guess I'm still a little *shell-shocked.*

You'd call that *weakness,* I'm sure...

Oh, I have more respect for you than you imagine, Captain.

After all...

...are we not both the faces of our nations?

Ha.

Well, what the hell. I may as well share it.

That first week after I came out of the ice... It was a *dark time.*

I'd lost *everything.* My best friend. *All* my friends. *All I had.*

I didn't know what I could hang on to.

And then *Tony Stark* came in with this little... *handheld cinema.* Future technology.

He showed me a *newsreel.*

Right there, I saw a man *walk on the moon.*

For all mankind.

And in that moment, I felt *hope* again.

And it hit me--*decades* had passed since then, while I'd been frozen.

Where must we have *reached?*

So... I asked Tony about ***Mars.***

Were there *rockets?* Were there *bases?* Did people *live there?*

Tony gave me this sad little *smile.*

Then he changed the subject.

And here we are.

Watching it all from the ***sidelines.***

...

And are you afraid?

What kind of question is *that?*

Afraid of *what*, Doom? The *future?*

Because that's not who I *am*. Never has been.

Despite everything I've been through, everything I've seen *others* go through-- *despite all the challenges to come--*

--I believe in a better tomorrow.

I just hoped we'd all look for it together.

I think, perhaps, we *will.*

There will come a *time--soon,* I believe-- when you find yourself needing my ***help,*** Captain.

And when that day arrives, you have my *word...*

...I won't make a ***gala performance*** *out of it.*

[00_hellfire_gala_X]
[00_sword__06]

HERE COMES TOMORROW

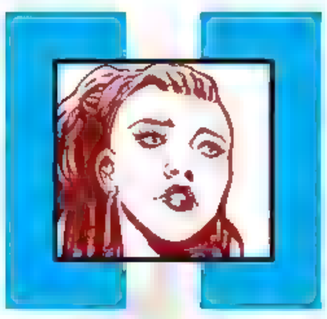
Krakoa promised that the Hellfire Gala would be a night to remember. They did not exaggerate.

As humanity's representatives watched, mutantkind terraformed and claimed Mars, the fourth planet of the Sol System.

The night isn't over.

Brand

Manifold



Frenzy

Wiz Kid

Magneto

Doom

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE. "THE PEAK."

And there you have it.

Using mutant technology, we have now *fully terraformed Mars.*

DIPLOMATIC SUITE ONE. "THE STRANGER ROOM."

Hope you all enjoyed the show.

We've already installed a *sister station--* ***the Keep*****--**along with a working *spaceport* and *diplomatic zone,* which you're all more than welcome to visit.

And we've begun the process of settling the planet, primarily with mutants of ***Arakko.*** They're a warrior culture-- ***you'll like them.***

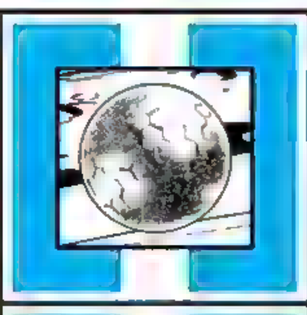
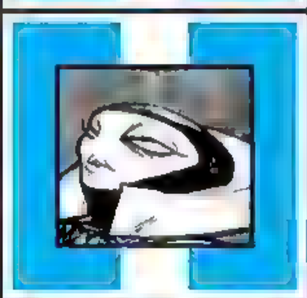
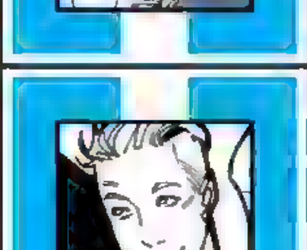
Any questions so far?

Just *one.*

Why exactly should we *care?*

[GALA....[represe]_00]
[CTIC....[ntative]_06]

GALACTIC REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE

GALACTIC RIM COLLECTIVE		**Orbis Stellaris**	Organic/mechanical fusion construct. 189 in human years.
GREAT KYMELLIA		**Nymbis Sternhoof**	Galactic Council member. Served during the Bhadsha War.
HOUSE OF RIGEL		**Mentacle**	Rigellian mutant and telepath. Convict, serving two standard years of diplomatic service.
ZN'RX EMPIRE		**Empress Kuga**	Empress of the Zn'rx. Ally of Krakoa.
INTERGALACTIC EMPIRE OF WAKANDA		**Riitho** *Ashura's son*	*"T'Challa's eye."* Rumored to also be one of the Empire's White Wolf operatives.
KREE/SKRULL ALLIANCE		**Paibok**	Power Skrull assigned to the Peak as full-time diplomatic envoy.
SHI'AR EMPIRE		**Smasher**	Superguardian. *Homo Sapiens.* Ally of Krakoa.
ASTROLOGERS OF SPARTAX		**Peter Quill** *the Star-Lord*	Master of the Sun. Half brother to Empress Victoria.
UTOPIAN KREE		**Noh-Varr**	Extra-dimensional super-diplomat. Founder of the *Utopian Kree* splinter movement.
EARTH (PARTIAL REPRESENTATIVE)		**Richard Rider**	Nova Prime. *"He stood when all else fell, and we remember."*

I don't wish to be *rude*, Commander--

I'm a telepath. He does.

--but we're all wrestling with an *economic crisis* on a *galactic scale*. ***We're busy.***

And you called us here to watch you engineer a *single planet?* Under your *home star?*

I will interject.

This method of planetary engineering is more efficient than any I have seen. Work that might take a full standard year will be performed in mere minutes.

Humanity is obviously capable of far more than I had previously considered.

True--Earthers can be *powerful.* And Commander Brand represents a powerful *faction.*

After all, Empress ***Kuga*** owes her very *reign* to you--*after her many defeats...*

Cease your *whinnying,* Kymellian--

But Krakoa is only *one faction*-- a single Earth nation.

Compared to what ***Wakanda*** has achieved from such beginnings, this feels...*unimpressive.*

That's *all* it feels? Because I *know* my birth planet.

This is gonna piss folks off.

It absolutely is. And while I don't want to start a fight *twice* in one visit, I think I'm *one* of them.

Did you consult ***anyone*** about this?

I mean, I'm meant to be Earth's *representative* on the *Galactic Council--*

But you've made it clear you have *other priorities,* Nova.

Remind me-- where were *you* when Knull came to Earth?

...

Off saving seven billion *other* people.

And stopping some homicidal gods.

Well, there you go.

Your plate is full enough without worrying about *us.*

If we could *continue?*

Thank you, Frenzy.

We need to do *more.*

And we have.

We call this *mysterium.*

The *rest* of you make fair points.

You're all from *civilized* communities--Earth remains something of a *backwater.*

A world of *factions.*

Terraforming our own backyard is exciting to *us--* ***not to you.***

A unique *meta-material*, condensed from certain *exotic particles.*

The recipe is need to know--but *Earth's mutants* are the only ones who can currently create it. *Bear that in mind.*

Over to you, Wiz-Kid.

It functions like a metal--but not just *any* metal. Let's start with *durability.*

Frenzy is holding a strip of hull metal from a *Kree starliner*--one of the toughest on the market.

CRN-N-NK

Whereas this is *mysterium.*

I formed this piece earlier. It's not hard at all to *shape.*

But once it's *"set"*--cooled to below *200 degrees kelvin*--it has strength on a par with ***secondary adamantium.***

Nnf.

If anyone *else* would like to try...?

It conducts electricity at *100% efficiency*--that beats graphene.

And unlike *most* metals, it *barely* conducts or retains *heat*--and it's *radiation-proof* besides.

Hhrrnn!

By the all...

Ship hulls a *tenth* of normal thickness that you can fly through a *sun.*

Computers that run at 100% efficiency *forever* and *never fail.*

I haven't even mentioned the *magnetic properties.*

Put simply--***this is what comes next.***

And it's *yours.*

You'll each leave here with *one hundred tons* of mysterium for your people. *A little goes a long way.*

That much alone--*judiciously applied*--will foster a minor *economic miracle* for your worlds.

Catch.

We also have *mysterium reserves* in various locations, which we're willing to donate to the *Galactic Council*--

--either to back the *credit* or use as the basis for a *new* unit of currency.

You could call it the "*Sol.*"

The Sol.

What *is* this stuff?

I have a query.

How much mysterium can be produced at once?

We don't intend to flood the *universe* with it--condensing it is an *effort*, and we don't need much ourselves.

We have our own technology.

T'Challa will no doubt accept your gift in the *generous spirit intended*, Commander--but, I suspect, *no more.*

Speak for yourself. This stuff *rocks.*

I speak for *Wakanda.* We *too* have our own technology--*and we do not need charity.*

No. Abigail Brand doesn't *do* charity.

This is a *bribe.*

The question is--*what does it pay for?*

I'm so glad you asked.

Krakoa made a similar deal with the *Earth* when this all started. We give you what you ***need***-- *what you can't do alone--*

--and what we ask in return is ***acknowledgment.***

We now have what all of *you* have. Instead of nations in *endless internecine squabbles,* we have a ***single unified world.*** A single ***government.***

Sol is finally a *true system* on the *galactic political stage*--so from this day forth...when you have *business* with Sol, it's not with *Earth.*

It's with the *capital planet* of the *Sol System.*

It's with *Planet Arakko.*

Any questions?

Just one.

Why should I care?

Doom? What are *you* doing here?

The question, Peter, is "*Why was I not invited?*" But we'll *table* that for now.

Along with those... *antlers.*

As for *you*, Brand...

...I'm waiting for my answer.

You say Sol is now a *true system.* A ***political entity,*** like *Rigel* or *Spartax* or the *Throneworld.*

Earth could never function as such, you claim-- because it is *divided.* None can truly speak for the *whole planet.*

And *then...* you imply that Mars is *different. United.*

That it speaks with *one voice.*

Doom would hear that voice.

Commander--?

We can make that happen.

Interesting that *that's* the most important facet of this for you...

Of course it is.

You are a *planner* at heart, Brand--a *mapmaker* for great journeys. But I speak of the ***true north.***

The *foundation,* without which all your plans will *crumble.*

Who *rules* your new planet? *Tell me his name!*

Who is the king of Mars?

Who would speak for Sol?

Victor...

...you know my name.

You have *all* heard it whispered.

It is *Wind-Rider.* It is *she-who-swam-with-Acanti.* It is *Hadari Yao.*

I am *Storm--* *Regent of Mars--*

--and I am the Voice of Sol!

CONFIDENTIAL + + + LEVEL 4 CLEARANCE

OT DISTRIBUTE DO NOT DISTRIBUTE DO NOT DISTRIBUTE DO NOT DISTRIBUT

From :: Paibok / the Power Skrull / *Diplomatic Envoy*

To :: Emperor Theodore Kaplan-Altman / Dorrek VIII / *He who brought warring stars together*

SENDER'S TIME: 3.55am (Mykines, Earth) **RECIPIENT'S TIME: 42.A8** (Throneworld Station)

Further to my previous update, my liege -- the other galactic societies have responded with extreme speed...and hunger. I've taken the liberty of tabulating their responses along with my own thoughts.

GALACTIC SOCIETY	DECISION	POTENTIAL REASONS
ASTROLOGERS OF SPARTAX	Accepted	Economic Necessity (Recovery)*
GALACTIC RIM COLLECTIVE	Accepted	Economic Necessity (Recovery)*
GREAT KYMELLIA	Accepted	Technological Necessity (Defense)
INTERGALACTIC EMPIRE OF WAKANDA	Rejected	They do not need mutant metal
RIGEL	Accepted	Technological Necessity (Expansion)
SHI'AR EMPIRE	Accepted	Political (Krakoan Ally)
UTOPIAN KREE	Accepted	Technological Necessity (Ideology)**
ZN'RX EMPIRE	Accepted	Political (Krakoan Ally)

*There is a degree of economic necessity for all of us. But these civilizations in particular suffered disproportionately at the hands of the symbiote god Knull.

** *"The gates of creation are manifold – I vow to open them all."* The Utopian Kree oath.

Other interstellar civilizations are responding as they hear the news -- I suspect few will follow Intergalactic Wakanda's example. "The Sol" has already become an informal term for a proposed "new credit."

Earth itself has yet to respond in a unified fashion, but -- begging your highness' pardon -- we can hardly expect them to start now.

As for our position: Speaking as your diplomatic envoy to Earth, I would strongly consider accepting Krakoa/Arakko's proposals -- but not too soon. The Alliance remains in a position of considerable strength, and by showing restraint, we can bring some pressure to bear on smaller matters -- such as the Wanda Maximoff situation, which has yet to be resolved, and which many consider an intolerable insult to the dignity of the throne.

It's not worth going to war over, Paibok -- but you're right. Let's make use of their free sample and play it cool until they schedule more time at the table.

-- T.

3:17 A.M.
MYKINES.

THE CELEBRATIONS ARE OVER.

...

Here's to you, then.

To all you have wrought.

...Magnus?

I...
I got your *invitation.*

Wanda.
I...didn't think you'd made it. I so wanted you to see the *fireworks...*
I'm sorry. I *tried,* but... I just couldn't *face* them.
Not after everything I did. Everything I said.

The Pretender can't sit at the feast.

Wanda...

Did I ever tell you of my *Anya?*

I...I can't...

No. Probably not.

The iron door, never opened.

She had eyes like yours and hair like autumn leaves. My beautiful *child.*

The humans killed her, of course.

I didn't even know I was a mutant then.

We were humans at the mercy of humans. Prey for their *systems,* their *societies...* and now...

...now I find myself the great ***mutant hero.*** I run our systems, govern our society.

I helped build a *world* today...and I was *happy...*for the ***children...***

But then... then I thought of ***my*** children. And how I'd ***failed*** them.

All of them.

Magnus, I'm not--you know I'm not ***really*** your--

I know.

But sometimes what is *real* is not the same as what is ***true.***

And sometimes it takes two to pretend.

You are my daughter, Wanda.

You will always be my daughter.

And I will do what I must to make things right.

S.W.O.R.D. #6 Connecting Variant

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

Full Spectrum Diplomacy

7

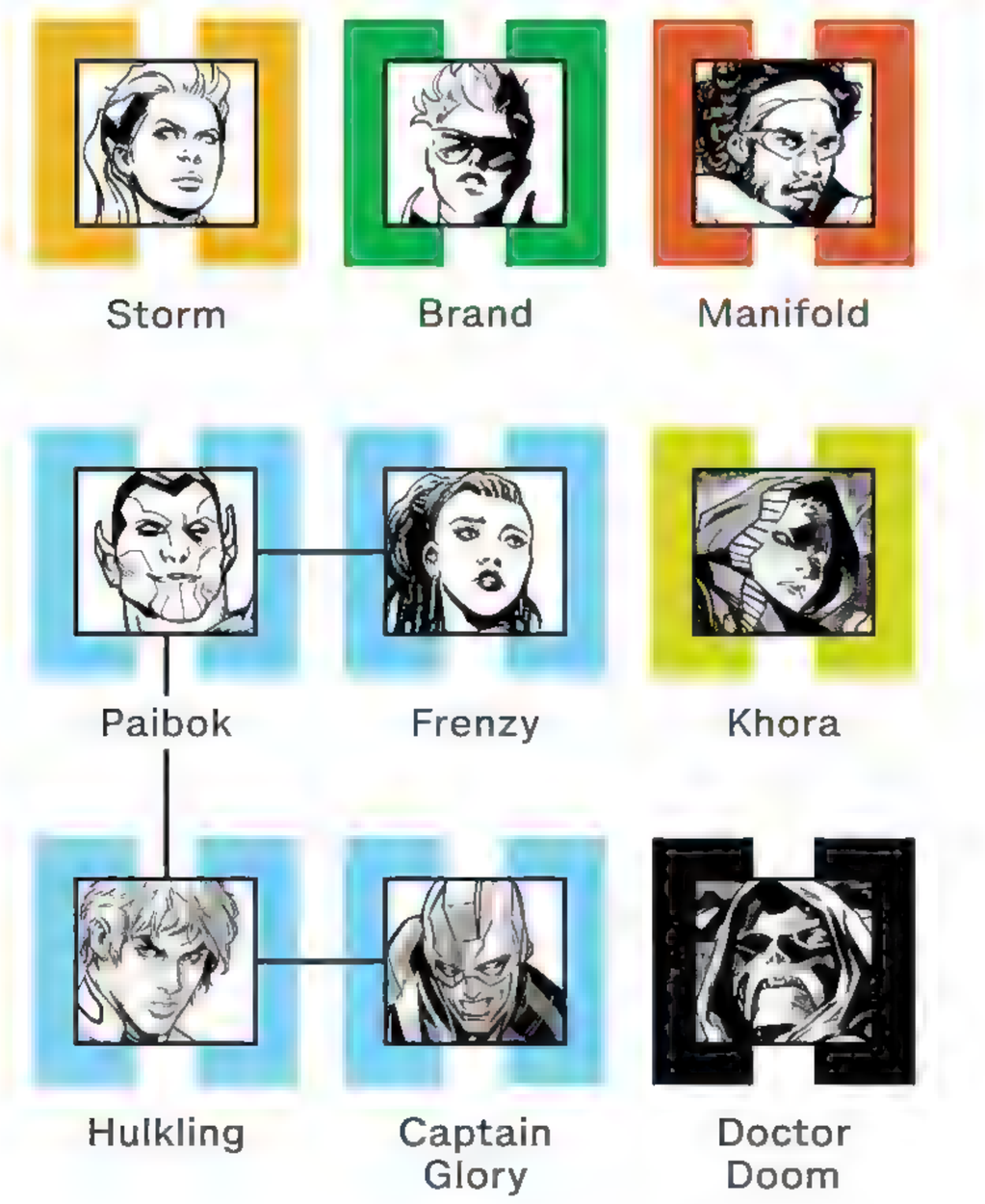
[00__annihi]
[00__lation]

THE LAST ANNIHILATION

Krakoa has terraformed and settled Mars with the mutants of the once-lost island of Arakko. Using the "miracle metal" mysterium, retrieved from higher space by the mutant circuit known as the Six, they have gained the favorable attention of the Galactic Council -- and bought full status and recognition for the Sol system, with the new Planet Arakko as its capital world. Storm, as Regent of Arakko and the Voice of Sol, is now our sun's representative in galactic affairs...

...and galactic affairs are heating up. The other-dimensional tyrant Dormammu has possessed Ego, the Living Planet, and is using him as the beachhead for a full assault on our reality -- starting with the Kree/Skrull Alliance.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the Hellfire Gala, certain guests have yet to return home...



8X8 EMERGENCY
EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO LIFE
PLANETARY ATTACK
HALA/THRONEWORLD II
UNDER THREAT
EMPEROR HULKLING
RESPONDING
LAURI-ELL THE ACCUSER
RESPONDING
SKRULLOS
UNDER THREAT
PRINCE CONSORT WICCAN
RESPONDING
KNIGHTS OF THE INFINITE
RESPONDING
GUARDIANS NOTIFIED
GUARDIANS RESPONDING
GALACTIC COUNCIL NOTIFIED
GALACTIC COUNCIL RESPONDING
EARTH NOTIFIED
EARTH IS NOT RESPONDING
RESEND SIGNAL TO ALPHA FLIGHT:
MINDLESS ONES DETECTED
8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY

8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY
8X8 EMERGENCY

THRONEWORLD II.

BUILT FROM THE RUINS OF HALA.

"Any word on that *long-distance translocation?*"

We have a *secure lock in place,* my liege. Ready to beam.

Fresh from the *Dreadrock Penal Colony* and his life sentence for the crime of ***high treason,*** I give you the Kree's *greatest Super-Soldier--*

--Captain Glory.

I did *say* you'd need me *one day,* Emperor Hulkling.

But I'm *surprised* the day came quite so...

...soon.

Yeah. *It's been one of those days.*

Have you been *briefed,* Captain?

They just hauled me out of my cell and into the *translocator*, your highness--

Well, here's the *short version.*

We're under attack by ***Mindless Ones,*** and we need every weapon we have-- *Super-Soldiers included.*

Mindless Ones...?

Magical entities.

Walking engines of *total destruction* aimed and fired by ***Dormammu,*** lord of the ***Dark Dimension.***

They come, they *see,* they *conquer--*

--and right now, they've got their laser eyes set on *us.*

*Sire...*where is the ***prince consort?***

Where is ***Wiccan?***

On ***Skrullos.***

They're hitting *that* too-- successive waves, like here.

Two *ancestral worlds* under threat, two of ***us.*** And we can't be seen to play *favorites* between Kree and Skrull.

Pretty effective way to ensure a "*Hulkling fights alone*" scenario-- only I'm ***never*** alone.

Am I, Captain Glory?

No, sir.

Not while I'm breathing.

Have you notified our *allies?* Your *own* homeworld?

The ***Guardians*** are engaging the enemy at the source. As for ***Earth***--I've sent a message to *Alpha Flight*, but--

My liege!

Portal activity! Mindless incoming!

...and they're not restricted by size.

The next wave. Radio *Lauri-Ell*--tell her to ***stand ready!***

Your majesty...in the *sky...*

What *is* that...?

That's why you're ***here,*** Captain. The *last* one of those took down *two battleships.*

The ***Mindless Armies*** come in *all kinds of shapes...*

...

Did Alpha Flight call you *back?*

Not yet, no.

Then maybe it's time to call someone else.

To your health.

I'll *admit*-- when you *agreed* to this meeting, I was not expecting to be provided with *dinner*...

PLANET ARAKKO. *FORMERLY KNOWN AS MARS.*

...and *certainly* not in such ***breathtaking surroundings.***

I'm glad you appreciate the *view*, Victor. We *worked hard to create it.*

As for *dinner*... sometimes letting an opponent know you can play *their games*--

--and by their rules--

--creates the proper *impression.*

How is the *bouillabaisse?*

I refuse to open my mouth grille for any dish less than *magnificent,* Ororo.

This...is ***superlative.***

Would it be rude of me to kidnap your chef?

An act of war. But an *understandable* one.

And less rude than turning your *dinner guest* into a ***chrome statue...***

Ah, yes-- that unfortunate business with ***Arcade...*** how long ago? I sent a *robot* in my place, as I remember.

Clearly, the machine was suffering some *grotesque internal fault* to so *cavalierly* break the sacred bonds of *hospitality.*

The *true* Doom would *never* disrespect a ***goddess.***

Don't *flirt*, Victor.

It's unbecoming.

My apologies. I merely meant that it is...*refreshing*... to see you in a role that befits your *capabilities.*

To see you as a ***true queen***... as opposed to... well...

...a *king's* wife.

Victor...do you *really* want to discuss our respective marriages?

So soon?

I tire of small talk.

We should speak of more *serious* matters-- perhaps serious enough to ***end worlds.***

We should speak of ***mysterium***...

...and *what it has wrought.*

Macro-Mindless is down!

For Hala!

Nicely done, Captain.

Stay up there-- we'll see more of those before long.

Corporal Enn-Lar--any word from Billy?

The prince consort just reported in--he and the Knights of the Infinite are holding the line on Skrullos with minimal casualties.

Good. Let him know we're okay too.

Maybe sugarcoat it a little. Don't let him worry.

Do you want to speak to him yourself, sir?

More than anything.

But if he's focused on me instead of the spell he needs to save his life...

Just keep me posted, Enn-Lar.

And patch me through to the Accuser.

Checking in for a status report, Lauri-Ell--what does the southern front look like?

Not good.

Dormammu's *magic* allows the Mindless Ones to teleport *right onto the battlefield.*

They're hitting our strongest units *directly*--like an *infection* attempting to ***overwhelm the Immune system...***

Mindless war--throw bodies at the problem until it falls.

Why ***Hala*** though? It might be the seat of government in a *month*, but right now it's a glorified ***construction site--***

My ***liege--***

--another ***Macro-Mindless*** incoming, as you predicted.

Just the *one* though...

...I'm guessing Dormammu can open only so *many* portals at--

SHRAK

Captain?

What just happened?

Two of them...k-killed each other, just to...get the drop on me...

Admirable... dedication...

I'm...I'm glad you called on me, sire.

It's...h-how I wanted... to...

WHOOM

Captain!

Captain Glory--

NO!

Another wave! They're coming in force!

Back-to-back!

Don't let them flank you--

Arrgh!

Translocator's gone!

We can't retreat--

I can't raise the Accuser! Comms must be *down* on her end-- or she's--

Don't say it! Just hold the line, Enn-Lar!

We're still in this fight!

We can *still*--

K-KRAAK

"The *magic* of this universe is *powerful*... but only *so* powerful."

The forces *beyond* this realm are less *limited.*

Which brings us to ***mysterium***--the mutant miracle metal.

Did you know it resonates with *magic?* It may even be *proof against it...*

That's not information we've *given away,* Victor.

As if you *had* to.

I am a *doctor of the fivefold art.* From *childhood,* I *forged* myself in the secret fire.

I have my mother's eyes.

Oh?

And what *exactly* is it you think you see with them?

Many things.

Mysterium is *not from our reality.* Using "*mutant technology*"--

--a *delicious* example of *naming-as-magic,* as your *technopaths* surely agree--

--you condense it from ***primal kirbons,*** cosmic particles that exist both *outside* our cosmos...

...and at the *heart* of it. For they have *always* been the same place--*the Above-place.*

The White Hot Room.

The Mystery.

And is that a *problem* for you, Victor?

That we were first?

You have stolen fire from heaven to hold in your hands. How could I *object?*

I have done the same *myself*--with one significant difference.

I wore gloves.

Be careful. You are *dabblers*--and in this arena, ***at this scale,*** the *unintended consequences* of dabbling can be *severe.*

The wrong symbol or metaphor can *destroy you.*

You have turned the *gold* the alchemists sought into *common coin*--shackled the *sublime* to the *material world.*

And thus...*you have altered the* ***balance*** *of things.*

Subtly, it's true. But enough to create a moment of *opportunity* for one who knows how to *seize* it.

Something is coming, Ororo.

Perhaps it's already here.

Storm.

This is ***Abigail Brand--***

--telepathing via *Mentallo.* Marvin says hi.

We just got word--the *Kree/Skrull Alliance* is under attack by *Mindless Ones,* and they're *not alone.*

Star-Lord's reported an attack on *Spartax,* and we're getting some weird traffic from the *Shi'ar.*

There may be more. *So!* hasn't been hit yet, but we shouldn't wait until it *is.*

I'm taking a team to *Hala* to assess the threat--I'll report back.

But if this *spirals*--you may want to address the *Great Ring.*

Understood.

I'll just finish dinner.

That look.

Are you now *learning* that which Doom *already knows?*

You clearly *need* the knowledge--so I offer it gladly. *Noblesse oblige.*

And *after* I have taught you--*once Doom has saved you from yourselves*--we will discuss how *Arakko* repays its debts...

...

Well, Victor.

Since we're discussing *metaphors...*

KRA-KROOM

Ororo...

Playing by your opponent's rules *can* create a good impression.

Refusing to play their games at all creates a better one.

Dinner is over. *Brandy and cigars will not be served.*

And while I thank you for your *generous offer to help us learn to crawl...it comes late. We are already flying.*

Do we have *more* to learn?

Of course--for we have *always* been a *school.*

But why would we need *you* to teach us, Victor?

With all that is on your hands... *all that can be laid at your door...*

...why would we need you?

...

So be it. A *shame* our dinner should end so *abruptly*--but *I*, at least, acted with *decorum.*

Doom has no regrets...

"...I only hope that when *tomorrow* comes, *you can say the same.*"

I'm *sorry*, Captain.

All of you.

Grandmother was *right*. About more than I wanted to admit.

My friends... my *enemies*...the *Earth*, *Alpha Flight*, all of it. I should have...

...*listened*...?

You really *should* have. I warned you all the way back at your *wedding party*, your highness-- *Alpha Flight* doesn't work.

That's why I built something better.

Let's go.

This is a *rescue*...?

Yeah. We're getting you *out*.

Don't try to stand--I can open a portal *underneath* you, drop you right into our medical bay...

There are still people *fighting* here. I can't...can't just *abandon* them--

KKAF!

My liege-- if your injuries are too severe for *shape-shifting*, you may *have to.*

Not to mention that we have healers on the ***Peak*** who can fix that damage in *minutes.*

Then you're *back in the fight*--with a *handpicked* **S.W.O.R.D.** team at your back. ***My gift to you.***

It's a *little* selfish. I want to break some of the *ice* between Krakoa and the ***Alliance...***

Right...the ***Wanda*** thing. Calling her *"pretender"*... Billy *hates* that. *We all do.*

Weird though... We...we tried contacting her with *magic,* but no *response*...like she wasn't there...

Guess...guess Dormammu was *blocking us...*

Yes.

Yes, that's probably it.

Brand!

We've got company!

Manifold-- get the emperor to the *med-bay!* The rest of you-- *hold fast!*

Once he's through and safe, we're *right behind*--and *no arguments on that,* Khora--

I didn't say anything.

Only thought it.

Just relax, mate. It won't be like *moving,* you'll just suddenly feel a *bed* under you.

Th-*thanks.* Still can't...can't believe the ***Avengers*** didn't come...

We called *Alpha Flight*...the distress signal went *through,* they *got it*... and *nothing*...

Yeah-- next time call the Avengers *direct.*

Henry Gyrich is in charge at Alpha--he probably wrote you off as an *acceptable loss*...

That wouldn't surprise me, Eden.

It's always the same in a *crisis*...

ABIGAIL BRAND :: PERSONAL LOG Z-1-12 21/6

"Eyes only." Never more than now. I'm only keeping this record in the event of post-resurrection memory loss -- it's important I know what I've done. And who I've done it to.

So, for the record -- when Emperor Hulkling sent that distress signal to Alpha Flight, there was every chance Gyrich would have passed it along to the Avengers. Hulkling's one of their own -- *their problem,* by his thinking. And, of course, they'd have all gone running to help.

I just couldn't have that.

It's not enough to have the Shi'ar and the Zn'rx in our corner. I need the Kree/Skrull Alliance as well if I want real pull with the Galactic Council. That means getting on the royal family's good side, which was already going to be difficult -- with the emperor's dead mother-in-law stinking up the after-party, it'll take a miracle.

So I intercepted the distress signal -- the way I can intercept all signals sent to the Alpha Flight Space Station.

And, of course, I blocked it.

Gyrich never even knew it existed -- neither will the Avengers. And S.W.O.R.D. gets to ride to the rescue. I've had nano-cameras on Throneworld since construction started, so I can pick the perfect moment to save the emperor's life. That way, even when he finds out about Maximoff and the crap really hits the fan -- *he'll owe me.* It's not perfect, but it'll let me start making the real moves.

Eventually, the goal is [redacted] Storm [redacted]

Needless to say, if the Quiet Council found out about *that*... Well.

That's why it's *"eyes only."*

...people show you who they really are.

S.W.O.R.D. #7 Variant by Ivan Shavrin

Call in the Big Gun

8

Deep space.

It's 0699 hours, Standard Galactic Time. The year is Epsilon something or other.

Or 2021, if you're from Earth.

I've been away for a while. Taking a long nap.

Of the dirt variety.

But someone else is due for their wake-up call today. And this is the alarm clock.

Graymalkin II--my home away from home.

Between the stealth cloak and the "Bodyslide" translocation tech--both decades ahead of anything in this era--she gets very sneaky on approach.

Even so, if I get any closer to this planet, they'll spot her. And if that happens, she's space junk.

The people of this world really like to break things.

That's why they call it the Breakworld.

But that's okay.

I like to break things myself.

Seal inner air lock membrane, Belle.

Have I mentioned that this is way, way beyond what the shield arm was ever tested for?

Duly noted--duly *ignored.*

It was designed to withstand *heavy combat*--if it can't handle *this,* I wouldn't have it in the ***arm-ory.***

"Heavy combat" is fighting drone tanks.

*You're about to fight a **planet,** Nathan--*

No.

I'm about to **beat** one.

Burst outer air lock membrane.

It makes a ***pop***--like a *pouch snap* opening. Fitting, really.

What do I keep in the pouches?

Bullets.

Graymalkin II vanishes behind me. It'll translocate out before the next *scanner sweep.*

Burning out the *jet boots* will get me up to around *ten times* maximum terminal velocity. The ultimate ***HALO*** drop--without the ***LO*** part.

High altitude, hard acceleration. ***HA HA.***

Job done, the boots *self-destruct* to reduce drag. At this speed, I'll hit atmosphere in about an *hour*--

--and thirty seconds after *that*, we'll explore how my *shielding* handles an impact that would atomize most of *Rhode Island.*

Nothing to do until then but *fall*...

...and remember the ***briefing.***

This'll be my *second* demonic invasion this month.

One hour ago--my first official briefing as *S.W.O.R.D. security chief* since I came back.

*Station One--**the Peak***--is just how I remember it from when I was a kid. By *their* timeline, that was *days* ago.

The Dread Dormammu is more an *extra-dimensional sorcerer*... but it's the same principle.

He's using shock troops--***Mindless Ones***--to attack *five magically significant planets*. If he takes them *all*, it's ***game over.***

S.W.O.R.D. is fighting to *prevent* that--as part of the new ***Galactic United Front.***

Commander Brand is still working out how she *feels* about the *new old me.*

Looking back, it's *obvious*--***"Kid Cable"*** was a *political appointee* to keep the influential *Summers family* sweet.

Decades of combat experience *later*, I'm finally the security chief she actually *needs.*

But here I am, *quite literally* twiddling my thumbs.

I'm assuming that means there's a *plan*...

There is.

Trouble is, we *both* like to be the ones in *control*. So now she's counting the cooks in the kitchen.

And so am I...

Not *my* plan--but I contributed some *necessary intel* to make it work.

You're working *with* someone? Now I know this is serious. Who's the genius in question?

Looking back, it should have been obvious. If *Abigail Brand* is listening to your ideas...

This guy.

...you'd have to be one of the ***greatest tacticians of all time.***

The name's ***Rocket.***

And yeah, I know--I'm a *raccoon-like individual* and that's *weird* for you 'cause you live on a *mud ball.*

Go ahead, muscles--get it all out of your system.

Sir.

This will be an honor.

...

What the flark--I'll take it.

Seeing *him*. That was the moment I knew for sure.

Bounce through time for *long* enough, you'll get one of *these* moments-- *"Where were you when...?"*

What's the ***plan,*** sir?

I already knew. But I wanted to hear him *say* it.

Ranger Rocket's a *galactic folk hero* in my era--even on ***Earth,*** people tell the stories.

He's remembered like ***Alexander the Great*** crossed with ***Jesse James.***

Dormammu's possessed ***Ego the Living Planet.*** That's his *beachhead*-- his *anchor point* in our dimension.

No ship gets *close*-- Dormammu's got an infinite *Mindless Army* plus his own magic. And Ego's no pushover *himself.*

Fighting them ***fair***... that's *not gonna be possible.* So we ain't *gonna.*

He's a ***legend.***

We're gonna cheat.

And today is the reason why.

That's where *you* come in...

That said--legends *lie*, and futures *change*. There's nothing stopping my dying *right here*.

Atmospheric friction's charging my shield arm with *thermal energy*. I'm using that to overclock the *defense field*--

--while I make like a speeding bullet at *1,700 miles per hour*.

Thanks to the *field*, I'm floating in a state of *zero inertia*--

--the perfect cushion against *catastrophic impact*...*unless*...

FRZZT

...the field *burns out*.

Like it just did.

No need to *panic*, Nathan. Even at *this* speed, there's...

...let's say *seven seconds* to impact.

Six.

Five.

Four.

Thr--

KRAKKROOOMM

NATHANIEL D. A. SUMMERS::
PERSONAL LOG Z-1-12 21/6::EYES ONLY

I wish I believed in history.

They say the past is another country. If so, I have a dual passport -- I've lived here for years. I have family here. Friends and loved ones.

And occasionally, as I wander through the country of the past, I'll come across a landmark I recognize.

Right now, I'm living -- again -- through the first Krakoan Age, when history says that mutants conquered Death. And for my sins, I get to live through what the alien civilizations of tomorrow will call the Last Annihilation. I get to be a single thread in the tapestry of a legendary hero.

But legends lie. Futures change. As a time-traveler, I can't afford to believe in history.

For example -- history says that mutants conquered Death.

Death is unconquered.

We've entered into a polite agreement with it, true. An arrangement. An armistice. Death has chosen, in the face of our great cleverness, to turn away from us.

That doesn't mean we won.

Dormammu is out there. While we were terraforming worlds and hosting galas, he was building his power and making his play -- possessing a living planet and turning it into a gateway for an infinite army.

Now those grim, gray, stony bastards are tearing apart Skrull warriors and Kree commandos, Shi'ar Superguardians and Spartoi astronomers. Even -- I am reliably informed by those who know -- the insectoid drones of the Chitauri.

Those people didn't get to sign the armistice. They're not part of the arrangement. They're Death's ace in the hole.

Because with every life lost, we come a little closer to Dormammu's victory.

When Death comes for us all, in a single moment...then we'll find out just how conquered it really is.

I should check the shield arm again. I wish I knew for a fact it wouldn't fail. I wish there were another way to get down there.

Lord, I wish I believed in history.

—

Well, they say any landing you walk away from is a *good* one.

Too bad about the ***shield arm***. Rebooting in time to *save me* fried every circuit.

Jettison *scrap.*

But better that than wasting time being *dead.*

Initiate *hard light holo-prosthetic...*

Mutants get second chances now--***missions don't.*** Besides, I came with a *backup.*

No matter *what* happens on an op...

...and boot ***Nicky combat tattoo suite.***

PHUM

Nate! Baby! Long time no see!

Are we gonna see some excitement [illegible]?

...I'm always heavily armed.

Nicky's a *combat-tuned* A.I.--less of an *all-rounder* than Belle, but he fits the situation.

Our entrance was *noisy*--Breakworld troops will be on the way.

Soaring 'em or. Auto-target ha's got your back dood

Not that I'm relying on him *alone.*

Making *planetfall* was just ***phase one.***

Phase ***two:***

Assemble the team.

Even in the thin soil of the Breakworld, a ***Krakoan gate*** grows from a seed in *seconds.*

Essentially, I can carry *every mutant on the island* with me in a single pouch.

But I just need my ***tight five...***

Cannonball. Air support.

Sam Guthrie reporting for *duty, sir.*

Like old times.

Boom-Boom. Demolition and explosives.

I *know,* right? I even wore the *old gear!*

Wiz Kid. Tech Support.

X-Force is *taken,* I hear.

Welcome to the ***All-New X-Terminators.***

Khora of the Burning Heart. Stealth combat, power augmentation.

Extermination?

Perhaps you Krakoans aren't so soft as you *appear.*

Lila Cheney. Long-distance teleportation.

So if we can all take a *gate* here, why'd you need *me?*

Bit *coals to Newcastle,* yeah?

X-Force is back--and it's "kickin' rad!"

A *family man*--but still the man I *trained.*

Steadfast. Courageous. Nigh-invulnerable while blasting.

Another former student. Despite the *frivolity,* I can always rely on her.

To blow things up.

Technopath. *The secret sauce of S.W.O.R.D. station.*

When I was *young,* I thought he was a *rock star.*

Her, I've never even *met*...but she *has* been at war for her *entire life.*

So we have that in common.

An *actual* rock star--*with an interplanetary fan base...*

...but that's not the talent we need today.

Everyone here has their role to play, Ms. Cheney.

Including them...

Aliens! Surrender yourselves now!

Right on schedule. *Breakworlders* come to investigate the *impact site.*

I'm a little surprised the shooting hasn't started *already...*

Those who resist us will die! The weak and the damaged will die!

Those we deem strong will *fight*--in the arenas of Powerlord Varrn!

That explains it--a new *ruler* with some new *rules.* I guess they got tired of waiting for ***Colossus*** to come back.

This is a world of *warriors,* then?

It is indee--

THUNK

...

Commander?

There's a knife in your face.

Khora--

What?

I took him at his word.

Wait for my *signal* next time. You're not a *solo operator* anymore.

And surprise attacks work better if *we're* not the ones getting *surprised!*

Kill them! Kill them all!

That's your issue? She killed that fella without even *thinkin'*--

When in Rome, son.

That said...

...select *nonlethal ammo*, Nicky. We need their skimmers *intact.*

I read, babe.

We *do* need the skimmers. But the truth is, Sam's *idealism* tends to rub off on me.

Besides, we're *guests* on this planet.

I'd hate to be rude.

None for the arena, then! Slaughter them all!

Bo-ring.

Tick, tick, tick--

The *time bomb* Boom-Boom manifested was *concussion-sized*. I'm sure it looks worse than it is.

Pretty sure.

I claim this one!

Smile, stripling--*it's your day to die!*

Dying on a mission? *Please.*

Do I *look* like a poser to you?

The *new hotness* is a *ripe old age*...

Shield up.

...and *some very big guns.*

BZAKK

NO--

BLAM

Very *flattering*, Taki.

You *did* hear me say we needed their transport *intact*...?

It really *has* been a long time for you, *huh?*

You *used* to know to *let the Wiz Kid work.*

Some interesting flavors of *alien tech* in here--

--but I think I can *improve* on them.

That's the *plan.*

Mount up, X-Terminators-- including *you, Sam--*

--We're riding into town.

LIVING OF BREAKWORLD!

THIS NOTICE IS POWERLORD VARRN!

THESE WORDS ARE POWERLORD VARRN!

OBEY AS YOU OBEY POWERLORD VARRN!

CITY SEVEN IS NOT FOR LIVING!

TO ENTER CITY SEVEN IS NOT FOR LIVING!

TO REMAIN IN CITY SEVEN IS NOT FOR LIVING!

TO LEAVE CITY SEVEN IS ONLY FOR DEAD!

THOSE WHO PERFORM ACTS NOT FOR LIVING

WILL BE MADE DEAD!

SO DECREES POWERLORD VARRN!

OBEY AS YOU OBEY POWERLORD VARRN!

NOW YOU ARE WARNED!

NOW YOU

OBEY!

Huh. I guess I know why you wanted me ridin' *this thing* instead of flyin' *myself*, sir.

There ain't a soul here. Nobody in sight.

If I started *blastin'*, I'd be heard for *miles*.

Yeah.

You do get a *bit* loud, Sam...

Uh, Lila...

My *days*, you've gone *red*! I was only messing!

Guthrie's just, like, this total *wife guy* now.

It was cute at first.

Oh, Sam was *always* a bit of a delicate flower. Very proper.

How *is* Izzy these days? I don't think I've seen her since the *wedding*...

Aw, you know. I'm a ***mutant***, she's a ***Superguardian***, we're raisin' a kid in ***Shi'ar space***...it gets *complicated*.

All the *same*... look, it's nice to have an old-time *X-Force adventure*. Nostalgia's *fun* once in a while.

But Lord knows I don't *ever* want them *"good old days"* back.

You don't miss the *past*? Before all the *diapers*?

The past's *written*--ain't nothing you can do with it but live it again.

The *future*... that's somethin' *else*. Somethin' *possible*. Something that *grows*.

I guess I'd rather be growin'.

Sometimes Sam's idealism gets a little *rose-tinted*. The future *I* remember didn't have much in the way of *possibility*.

But then, that's what I've always fought for-- ***a better tomorrow.***

I don't worry about whether the future can *change*--it always does.

What worries *me*... ***is whether I can change to meet it.***

KLIK-KLATCH

Everyone-- *stay sharp*. Using the skimmers means we can get close without *arousing suspicion*...

...but only *so* close.

Too true, old man. This is *ambush territory*-- I can sense it. This is not a city people *live* in.

It's a blind. A trap.

A weapon.

I'll have to work with Khora again.

She's good.

Less of the "*old man.*"

But... you're right. This is *not a living space,* people.

It's a *factory*--fully automated to build *itself* into what it needs to be. *A self-evolving machine.*

It houses the *weapon* we're here to steal--and even flying *stealth,* it's going to detect us in *less than a minute.*

Weapons hot.

You can't give up what you don't know. *Even under torture.*

...

You're briefing us on this *now?*

Gross.

The *Mark I* was as big as a moon. This is the *Mark II*.

A more *compact* model...

VRRRT

WHIRRR

CLK-CLUNCH

EERT

WWWM

...but I think you'll find it stands up.

I meant what I said *before*, Cable. Resurrection or no--*I'm not dying for the glory of Krakoa.*

And damn sure not for the glory of *you.*

That stings a little. Guess he still sees me as a *gung ho kid.*

But he's right. Even if we *do* live again--our *lives* and our *pain* are not a ***resource.***

I won't spend them needlessly.

Every *one* of us has a job to do, Taki--

--and when we're done, ***we're all going home.***

Unfortunately, war has a way of making you *lie.* You tell people what they need to hear to keep going.

Even *yourself.*

Especially yourself.

KA-THOOM

Form up! Link the platforms together! Sam--wait for my signal!

Khora--you're up! Get ready to share your power!

If you wish, commander.

But no warrior of *Arakko* would ask for help. It would *insult* them if I--

Yeah. I used to think that way *myself.*

You'll grow out of it.

Save the backchat and do it!

Link with *Boom-Boom*-- I want her at *double her full power!*

Tabitha--*you know what to do! Fifteen second fuse!*

I--I can *feel the fire-- burning--*

I thought-- *thought I knew bombs--*

--but *those weren't bombs!*

Because THIS!

THIS is a BOMB!

Holy--

That is a *bomb*, all right.

How many seconds again?

You're on delivery, Sam. *Get it where it needs to go.*

And remember--I said we're *all* going home. *That's an order.*

Come on, Sam. Take the *hint.*

Don't worry about *me*, sir.

I'm a lot better at this than I *used* to be.

An' I'm *still* nigh-invulnerable when I'm--

Don't make me a liar this time.

Sam...

Wiz Kid-- let's *finish* this. *Khora*, go with him--

Why? With his power level, he doesn't *need me.*

Ugh, that again?

Look, if it makes you feel better, I *don't* need you.

I could come down here by *myself*--

--find the nearest *access terminal*, reach into the factory's *systems*--

--and in *two minutes*, I could find the *exact* subroutines we need, *activate* them and put us in control. *Two minutes.*

Or with a boost from *you*--I could do it in two ***seconds.***

So why *wait?*

You're on the ***team,*** Khora.

Teamwork makes the dream work.

VRRT

THNNK

WHIRRR

VREEE

CH-CHONK

Now I have a planet-sized super-gun.

Ho, ho, ho.

Need a boost *yourself*, Lila?

I can steal *big* things as easily as *little* ones.

If you wanted me to take us *across the street*, I might need help...

...but *interstellar distance* is what I do--*in a* ***heartbeat.***

Welcome to *Port Prometheus, Mars.*

Good work, team.

You as *well*, Nicky--I should use you and the *others* more often.

Do good good.

It's *faint praise*--but there's a war on. I can tell them how *proud* I am later.

And I *am* proud. Days like this, even *my* future seems bright.

I feel like the world is my *oyster*...

Brand--the ***X-Terminators*** have done our part. How's *yours?*

...or maybe my ***pouch.***

It took most of our remaining *mysterium*, Summers--but with *Rocket's* help, the engineering went without a hitch.

You've brought us the *gun*...

And what do I keep in the pouches?

...we have the ammunition.

Blam.

Cable: Reloaded #1 Deadpool 30th Anniversary Variant

by Rob Liefeld
& Bryan Valenza

Unbroken

9

Above what once was *Mars*, I soar in a private sky.

I took an envelope of atmosphere with me to S.W.O.R.D.'s *Station Two--* ***the Keep.*** On leaving, I wrapped it around me like a cloak.

Cautioned the air from deserting me to seek the vacuum. Bade it stay warm against the chill of open space.

I *could* have gone by the gate.

But the people of ***Arakko***--this world I helped bring to life--were forged in an *endless war.* They respect those who can *defend* their broken land.

I know how Arakko thinks. What they must *expect* from me.

But casual miracles are my stock-in-trade. I am an ***Omega mutant***--*one of the few.*

And more.

I am their Regent.

I took that title. I *held* it. I hold it *still.*

Arakko has not broken me, and *I will not break.*

I will not break for Arakko.

Not yet.

Where is she?

Are we not all here *present?* All *waiting* for this one who thinks herself *ruler of this world?*

If she'd speak for everything under our sun, *where is she? Tell me!*

Fiery Calderak offers challenge!

She's running late. I just got a psi-flash from Mentallo.

Should I go down there and *say* something? Make an excuse on her *behalf?*

Do you want to be Regent of Arakko?

Hmm.

No, not right now.

Then don't step into the *Circle Perilous.*

It's simple. If you want a seat on the Great Ring, you challenge the one sitting.

No hindrance, no help. If you step into the Circle, there are only three ways out.

You win.

Or you die.

Or you yield.

The rider of the winds is afraid! For she knows I will show her the hurricane!

Calderak will show her a storm--of fire and flame and molten rock--and leave her ashes scattered in her own wind!

Talks a lot, doesn't he?

It shows weakness. If Storm is delayed, she is only delayed.

If she is hiding, that's another thing again--but Calderak can't make it so with words.

Anyway. She's here.

See it?

See what...?

Well?

Where is--

Eh?

What... what are these tiny little...?

Aahhh!

So--so cold--

Are we done? Do you *yield?*

S-so cold.

You-- you are a *witch--*

A *weather witch.* Say it with *respect.*

I have a meeting to attend to, Calderak.

Do you yield?

[OO.GREAT....O]
[OO.RING.....O]

THE NINE SEATS OF THE GREAT RING

THE THREE SEATS OF THE DAWN. These three seats plan for the three outcomes of any conflict. *They are deferred to in time of* ***WAR.***

01 - THE SEAT OF VICTORY. When the battle is won, this seat plans the next. Because it is traditionally the seat most consulted, it is also called the **Head of the Great Ring.**

Once, this was the seat of **Genesis.** Now **ISCA THE UNBEATEN** sits here.

02 - THE SEAT OF STALEMATE. Not all battles are won or lost. When there is no clear winner, this seat is consulted.

IDYLL sits here.

03 - THE SEAT OF LOSS. This seat is consulted in dark times of humiliation and pain, when the world has fallen.

TARN THE UNCARING sits here.

THE THREE SEATS OF THE DAY. The seats of the world and of what can be seen and touched. *They are deferred to in time of* ***PEACE.*** ***They are deferred to now.***

04 - THE SEAT OF ABOVE-US. Consulted on matters of the heavens.

LACTUCA sits here.

05 - THE SEAT OF ALL-AROUND-US. The central seat is consulted on matters of the land, the people, the weather and the turn of the world. As a matter of unbreakable law, this seat has an **additional casting vote** -- thus, whoever claims the responsibility of sitting here is known as **Regent of Arakko.**

STORM sits here.

06 - THE SEAT OF BELOW-US. Consulted on matters of the deep.

SOBUNAR sits here.

[0.3].....Dawn]
[0.6].....Day]

THE THREE SEATS OF THE DUSK. These seats are consulted on what cannot be seen and cannot be touched. *This table, though necessary in both war and peace, is* ***NEVER DEFERRED TO.***

07 - THE SEAT OF LAW. Consulted on all legal matters. The laws of Arakko are few and do not change easily. But when they do, this seat is the **final arbiter.**

ORA SERRATA sits here.

08 - THE SEAT OF HISTORY. Consulted on matters of lore. This seat records -- *and decides* -- the history of Arakko.

XILO WHO-WAS-STULGID sits here.

09 - THE SEAT OF DREAMS. Consulted on matters of art, poetry and song. Few challenge for this seat, but those who do are the most dangerous -- *for they never yield.*

LODUS LOGOS sits here.

THE GROUND ON WHICH ALL SEATS REST.

00 - THE VOICE OF ARAKKO. Arakko itself -- *the island that fights like a man* -- is always present. However, in the ongoing absence of **REDROOT,** direct consultation is difficult. Arakko has little to say on this or on any other thing. ***But Arakko is listening.***

Always.

No mutant who was not an Omega-level mutant has ever sat on the Great Ring.

Not once.

It has never happened -- *it never will.*

But the Great Ring has only nine recognized seats.

There are rumors of three more.

THE GREAT RING OF ARAKKO.

My fellow Arakkii.

Ororo of the Storm takes the Seat of All-Around-Us at the Table of Day.

Keen edge, sing from the dark... Heavy and strong... Whistle like her wind.

FWISH

THAP

My compliments, cousin. This one has the best balance yet.

Would you like it back?

I captured the essence? That pleases me. Keep it, Wind-rider.

I hope to speak a more perfect gift into being soon.

I will wait *eagerly*, Lodus Logos.

But for now--I see one empty seat.

Will *Ora Serrata* be joining us?

Ora izz recording your just-fought *duel*--confirming that it wazz in accordanzz with *law*.

As keeper of *history*, the fight zzeemed... *inconzzequential*.

No contest is without consequence for the loser, *Xilo*.

But you called us here for *discussion*, Regent.

What did you wish to discuss? Is there to be *another* contest today?

Will there be consequences?

Well, Ororo?

Answer her question.

Will there?

...I told you the *last time* we met here, Tarn.

An act against Krakoa--*on whose Council I also serve*--is an act against *me.*

Yes.

You did.

And you gave your word--*to all here*--that you would not set foot on that island.

Yes.

I *did.*

And *then... I did.*

*And then I beat the thieves that live there like dogs.**

*See HELLIONS #14 --JDW.

And I will do the same *again.* And *again.*

Until I am satisfied.

If you like, I'll continue to *lie* about it. A mark of my *respect* for you.

To the Vile, Tarn's word has *hideous meaning.* But to those less... it is *emptier than air.*

A fart.

And praise Tarn for even that.

...

That sounds a lot like a challenge, Tarn.

Is that a route you want to take?

"Challenge"! You speak the word with such... *gravitas.*

But you are on ***Arakko,*** Ororo-of-many-names. Challenges fall here like *rain* or *blood.*

How did you get to sit *here* without knowing *that?*

I AMM YUU.

I AMM YUU.

I AMM YUU!

N-no--

How else? The challenge was *made*, Tarn.

The rain fell.

And the blood flowed.

And now this seat is mine. *The casting vote. The regency of Arakko.*

No mutant has taken it from me. I did not yield to *them*-- I will not yield to *you.*

I will meet you in the Circle.

It is your prerogative to be late. But do not *run,* Tarn.

Do not *hide.*

Are you after her *seat,* Tarn?

The Seat of Loss fits me *well,* Isca. I have no ulterior motive.

She simply *offends* me.

Her death is motive enough.

ONE HOUR LATER.
THE CIRCLE PERILOUS.

So. Tarn the Uncaring.

On a scale of one to ten, how *dangerous* is--

Count the numberless dead in the *Abyssal Prisons* he helped oversee.

"Then double it."

Ororo.

You're on time, I see.

And you aren't *hiding*.

So we're *both* pleasantly surprised.

Ah, verbal jousting. That *pleases* me.

When an opponent shows me their *spirit*...

...before I take it away.

Fall.

And *that* is how the *Great Genomic Mage* fights his battles--*by ending them.*

Uff--

WHUMP

I edited your DNA with my *mind.*

Disarmed your mutant weapon. Your *power.*

Wind-rider no more. Ororo *Earth-crawler* now.

But all the same...

...let's make sure.

SSKLUCH

EEAAAAHHH!

NO...

It is *Tarn.*

He does not care.

I could give you *new* powers--*weapons of the Vile School*--but you have not *earned* them.

Still, if you approach with *deference*, I will *end* this humiliation--*by taking your life.* ***As is your custom.***

And why not? *What are you now,* oh Voice of Sol?

What is Storm without the storm?

you... do not know?

Hurrkk!

Then I will show you.

If I see your eyes glow again, I will *touch* the blade that rests against your heart. *Once.*

That's all it will take.

I--*hnn!*-- I can kill you with a *single thought*--

Before I kill *you?* Are you *sure?*

Can you bear your great work ending like *this*, oh Genomic Mage? By all means, then.

Take your chance.

...

Damn you.

I yield.

Then we are *done.*

AAAA-HH!

I still-- *nnf!*--still *win,* Ororo.

You ***cannot*** remain on the Great Ring. *I took your power from you*--they will not *accept* you without it.

For without it, you are--

The Regent of Arakko. I have not given the role *up,* Tarn.

Nor will I.

Madness. You are powerless. *You are broken.*

You--you cannot *possibly* win a *further* challenge...

Can you...?

...

Ha.

Ha!

Storm the Uncaring!

HA HA HA HA!

You fooled me, Ororo. With your Krakoan disguise.

But now... I see you as you are.

You are of Arakko, Wind-rider. And perhaps... yes.

Perhaps even of Amenth.

LATER.

Congratulations. You're a *perfect match* with what's on file.

No sneaky *DNA traps*, no psychic *time bombs*... you left the Circle exactly how you came *in*.

We even checked to see if Tarn gave you a *boost*. Took a couple of *years* off, amped your *abilities*...

STORM'S QUARTERS IN THE KRAKOAN EMBASSY ON ARAKKO.

NO.

No, he *wouldn't* have, would he?

Because that would be an insult.

I know how Arakko thinks. What they *expect*.

Across the plains, the thunder is a song.

I am ***exhilarated.*** Dangerously so.

The air smells electric and alive, and the clouds have taken shape.

I will not break for Arakko, I tell myself. *Not yet.*

But I know storms. And when they *do* break...

...is when they show their true face.

S.W.O.R.D. #8 Variant by Russell Dauterman

Friends in High Places

10

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.

James MacDonald Hudson.

Welcome to Alpha Flight.

My little joke. I couldn't resist.

What with my being Commander of the *Alpha Flight Program* and your being leader of the *old*--

I get it, Gyrich. What there was to get.

Is that what we're doing now? Making *jokes?*

No, no. You're right, of course.

This...is no joke.

Aliens, Mr. Hudson. Aliens flocking to our nearest neighbor.

To break bread with the *mutant revolutionaries*--some of them ***known terrorists***--who have populated Mars with *immigrants* from a *foreign reality.*

Arakko. That's what *they* named it.

But we named it *first.* ***For the God of War.***

And we'll go to war to take it *back.*

Henry...

Something the matter?

It's just... This is *difficult* for me.

I've known Logan for *years* now...

Oh, *Jimmy.* ***Really?***

Some of your best friends are *mutants?*

We all saw the *fireworks*-- Logan wasn't *there*. Terraforming worlds is an ***Omegas-only*** job.

I imagine he stayed right at the bar and drank a *beer*... or a *dozen*...and told himself it was all ***A-okay.***

You'd think he'd have *qualms*. A man of the wilds, watching "his people" turn a wild planet *tame*...

Does that adamantium skull block ***telepathy,*** I wonder.

What are you *saying*--?

You know how people have *used* him over the years, Jimmy. ***Manipulated*** him.

Now, *me?* I don't shed tears for *mind-controlled super-weapons*. But *you*...well, your being his *friend* and all...

Henry-- I *made* my choice. I'm with ***ORCHIS,*** all right?

I don't need *persuading*--I need to know what your *plan* is. What exactly are we using against ***a whole planet of X-Men?***

Friends in high places, Jimmy.

Friends in high places.

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO. "THE KEEP."

Shi'ar Delegation-- this is Commander ***Abigail Brand.***

Your Krakoan gate from Chandilar is *approved.*

You'll be traveling under the invitation of ***Cannonball,*** an X-Man in good standing--

--though I understand he's also making a name for himself as a *deputized Subguardian* on his new home of *Krii-7.*

Frenzy, our *Solar Ambassador,* is waiting in the Diplomatic Zone along with a detachment from *S.W.O.R.D.'s security team.*

Consider them a show of Sol's ***goodwill***-- after all, I'm sure they won't be *needed...*

...considering the ***Shi'ar Imperial Guard*** has a certain reputation for *getting things done.*

Welcome to ***Planet Arakko,*** Empress Xandra.

Welcome to Sol.

Close channel.

That's my *softest soap*-- I hope it makes up for ***Ororo's*** not being there. What's more important than formally opening the *official Shi'ar Embassy?*

Ah, you know...

"...the *usual.*"

THE CIRCLE PERILOUS.

The noontide seat is not *for* you, Krakoan! *How can it be?*

How can you rule us when you were not there?

Because I'm here *now,* Kobak Never-held.

And I'm *staying.*

I'd assumed the challenges would *slow down* once she won ***Tarn the Uncaring's*** approval. He was the last *Great Ring* holdout...

It's a big planet. Lots of mutants, lots of *challengers.*

Don't worry-- I *know* Storm. She'll be there when we need her.

Let's hope. One of the objectives today is to send the Shi'ar home with a *smile.*

That'll be hard *enough* without the Voice of Sol canceling a playdate with the *Shi'ar empress.*

Computer-- patch me through to the ***Peak.*** I need to chat with my new *number two.*

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE. "THE PEAK."

This is *Commander Brand* calling *Acting Commander Cable.*

How's the *view?*

EYES ONLY :: PERSONNEL NOTES
NATHAN SUMMERS / CABLE :: EYES ONLY

[DE. .[ep]__OX]
[SEC .[ret]_09]

ABIGAIL BRAND :: Z-2-08 :: GSTC 1010

There were two excellent reasons to pick Cable as my security chief. Unfortunately, they were both his parents.

Jean Grey was a Quiet Council member in the very best standing. Scott Summers was Captain Commander. And their son was a distracted teenager playing at being the Old Man he'd one day become -- enough combat skill to be useful, but not enough tactical and strategic know-how to become difficult. There was every chance he was going to stay that way too -- as I heard it, he'd come to our time as a fresh-faced youngster to prune the branch of his timeline that became the Old Man in the first place. New Cable, new future.

Except the new future didn't pan out -- not for him and not for me. Summers and Grey have excised themselves neatly from Krakoan politics, so putting their kid on my team no longer gives me even secondhand pull with the Council. And as for young Nathan... Well, the Old Man's back again.

Older, wiser and smarter. He looks at me through that glowing eye of his like he knows everything I'm about to do -- and maybe he does. For all I know, he read it in a history book.

And Glorp knows how history will tell the story of what I've got planned. They'll acknowledge the necessity of it, I'm sure.

But I doubt they'll be kind.

[D_[en]Y.....[0]
[EVE_r[yth]ING..[9]

/// DEEP SECRET :: ABOVE EYES ONLY ///

Private note: That glowing eye? It's not the window to Cable's soul, but, all the same, it might be a window of opportunity. Nathan Summers is infected with the Techno-Organic Virus -- what Warlock's species, the Phalanx, use to commune with (and consume) organic life. It's generally in his full control -- he uses it as an interface with his various prosthetic arms, but he can form a prosthesis entirely out of techno-organic material, and has done so for years at a time. His control of the virus is beyond anything I've ever seen, outside of the Phalanx themselves.

That all comes down to Cable's telekinesis, which is vastly overpowered -- to the point that it could burn his system out if controlling the virus didn't keep it occupied. So the TK controls the TO and the TO controls the TK -- a balance as delicate as a house of cards. Playing the right ace could bring the whole thing down on him... Too bad I deal from the bottom of the deck.

(Which is exactly the kind of strained metaphor turned dad joke he uses all the time. It's kind of a shame he'll never read this. I think he'd appreciate the thought.)

STATION COMMAND. "THE GREEN ROOM."

More to the point--how's my *office?*

Green isn't my color, Brand.

And I can't quite get the hang of sitting in your *chair...*

That sounds like a *metaphor.*

Could be. It's a little bit too *comfortable.*

When I feel *relaxed* is when I know *trouble's coming...*

That's why I *put* you there, Nathan.

Between that debacle with *Phobos* and the space threats the *X-Men* are having to deal with for us, comfortable is what we *don't want to be.*

Keep watching the skies. If I've learned *one thing* since we settled Arakko--

"--it's that trouble comes when we're ***distracted.***"

SNFF SNFF

Uh...

Mutant-humans. No skrull. No chameloid. No induced image. She is who she is, your Majesty.

And my microvision shows a full DNA match with our files.

Thank you both.

I apologize if that seemed impolite, Ambassador.

But I have been saved from the murderer's knife more than once--and I would hate to impose further.

But tell me--where is my savior? The great Regent of Arakko? The Voice of Sol?

Could Storm not even say hello?

We've got confirmed puppy dog eyes, people. This is bad.

We cannot afford to snub the Shi'ar right now...

Brand? This is Wiz-Kid.

I've got an unauthorized approach in Arakko orbit.

Five-person craft, dropping out of warp--way too close. Not answering hails...

"...and they're aimed right at Lake Hellas."

Basic *assassination tactics*...

Target-lock the engines with a *fire-and-forget*. Bring them down in the larger lake, away from the zone.

I'm *on* it--but--

--it might be *too late*. I've got a ***translocation signal***.

Whoever's *on* that ship...

"...they already beamed down."

What...?

DEATH TO THE SHI'AR EMPIRE!

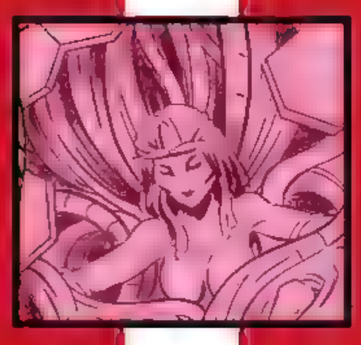
Death to their tyranny! Death to their sniveling Earther allies! Death to the Imperial Guard!

SO SAYS THE NEW LETHAL LEGION!

[LET....[leg]_00]
[HAL....[ion]_09]

OS017-SERIES ENHANCILE CATALOGUE :: "THE LETHAL LEGION"

Armed with the latest psychic warfare technology -- as well as some fan-favorite weaponry from previous years -- our latest enhanciles are our most powerful yet. Each can be utilized individually or combined seamlessly into the perfect five-being terror cell -- so whether you want to take full credit for their atrocities, or use them to throw suspicion off your larger goals, the OS017-Series "Lethal Legion" is here to meet your every need.

OS017-001 :: FIRST VARIETY :: ***"HALF-BOT"***		All the functionality of the OS016 Tactical Combat Droid you know and love, more efficient than ever -- and now with an additional organic component to induce psychological horror in any foe. Please specify planetary origin of corpse when ordering.
OS017-002 :: SECOND VARIETY :: ***"MR. ELOQUENT"***		Augmented for melee combat -- with the return of OS015's award-winning "atomic chain saw" -- 017-002 comes media-ready with one of five winning personality types, each with a believable pre-programmed backstory for those vital to-camera monologues.
OS017-003 :: THIRD VARIETY :: ***"THE ELECTRIC HEAD"***		For years, we were told that the problem with vat-grown telepathic super-brains was getting them out of the vat. So we brought the vat to us, built into a fully functional OS016 Bipedal Tank Unit. Just the thing to crush your enemies... physically and emotionally.
OS017-004 :: FOURTH VARIETY :: ***"ORBIS EXTREMIS"***		Sometimes evolution needs a little help -- like the raw power of an "Orbis Stellaris" brand organo-mechanical fusion shell, routed through the brain of an Alpha-class psychic sensitive. That means laser-focused control of any element on the battlefield... or in the boardroom.
OS017-005 :: FIFTH VARIETY :: ***"DEATH GRIP"***		OS017's emphasis on psychic combat doesn't mean we've forgotten the traditional pleasures of biological warfare. 017-005 combines next-gen necrotic bacteria with uploads of Kree, Xandarian and Centaurian unarmed combat styles for the perfect "one-touch" kill.

Empress Xandra--stay behind me, please--

Do as she says, your highness.

Fang--wait for my order--

Hrrrrr...

FANG! NO!

RRRAAARR--

--hrrrkk!

Mammal versus machine. Hypothesis: machine victory.

Hypothesis... ...confirmed.

SKLUTCH

NO!

You'll *burn* for that, creature!

Temperature: **one thousand degrees Kelvin.**

Internal heat sinks compensating **fully.**

Enemy hypothesis: **inaccurate.**

Super-guardians--pick a target and make them suffer! ***For Fang!***

Make them *rue the day* they attacked the *Imperial*--

URRAAAUU

--gguhh!

WORTHLESS

USELESS

HOPELESS

S-some kind of *emotion-inducing weapon!* Broadcasting extreme frequencies of *infrashame!*

I...don't *deserve* to lead... I'm *nothing*...

Gladiator's powered by *confidence*-- and that fella just shattered it.

Figure he must know our *weaknesses*...

Not all of us *got* a weakness, kid.

Lessee how that *big glass brain* handles--

--A NEUTRON PUNCH!

That's a *hundred times* local gravity in *each knuckle*, buddy!

WHAM

AAAUUURR!

Right, right-- ***Neutron.*** Your thing's *mass control*, ain't it? You got a *microsingularity* inside you, I hear.

And *indestructible skin*, pal--so step up and--

AARRRH!

Indestructible, huh? Well, I got an *atomic chain saw* here--

--and it says there's no such thing!

Aw, no--

Aw, yeah.

Unstable things, micro-singularities.

SHLOOP

This is a killing ground!

I have to get my empress to *safety!*

Agreed.

Random-- ***Forearm***--when the princess is *clear*, open up with *everything you have.* We need to draw their fire.

Shi'ar diplomats are dropping like *flies* here--

Not just them.

I am the Orbis Extremis. I speak to the *mind's ear.*

I speak to you.

Random?

What's--

Glllmmb!

I hear you.

I hear you.

Forearm!

Damn it-- psychic weaponry again--

Marshall! Fight it!

Don't make me beat you to death with your own--

I got this, ma'am.

Excuse me? Ball lady?

Begone, stripling--before I speak into your fragile--

You ever play soccer?

It's an Earth game. I tried it once.

Turns out I'm pretty good at it.

And I'm *also* pretty good at--

--hrrk.

And then he died.

For the touch of the *Death Grip* is the touch of *pestilence*. The touch of *bacteria* and sweet *decomposition*.

Learn well. Whether great or small...

...we all rot down in the end.

Real clever, you sick sonova-gun!

Let's see you try that on a fella who's nigh-invulnerable while he's blastin'--

Guthrie, no!

He'll slay you with a touch, you fool--

Cal'syee.

Look.

Look who's here.

So full of fire, young man. So full of life.

Watching you putrefy will be a rare--

KRA-DOOM

Visitors of Arakko.

My apologies for not arriving sooner--there were pressing affairs of state.

But now...

...you have my full attention.

Hmm. Weather manipulation.

Sometimes I regret leaving the study of inborn enhancements to others...

Are there limits to such an ability, I wonder. Could it be cloned? Or shut off?

Do you know, Gyrich?

In my experience, getting past Storm's *powers* just takes the right *weapon.*

Congratulations on your *enhancement tech,* by the way. If our little alliance makes for a successful *test,* maybe I'll buy some *myself.*

Gyrich out.

...

You're collaborating with an *alien?* That's...not *like* you, Gyrich.

Orbis Stellaris is from the *Galactic Rim,* Jimmy. So he's how I *like* my aliens.

Friendly and very far away.

But fortunately for *us,* I also have assets *closer to home.*

It's time to activate my *mole* in the enemy camp, I think--

About time.

Listening in, were you, Mr. Mole? I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

Ready to show S.W.O.R.D. where your *true* loyalties lie?

More than ready, Henry. So you just sit back...

...and let the Wiz-Kid work.

S.W.O.R.D. #9 Variant by Davi Go

Triple Threat

11

FIVE HOURS AGO.

My name is *Takeshi Matsuya*, and everyone's always tried to *figure me out.*

Even on *Krakoa*, I get looks. Glances. Studious *looking away.* Humans and mutants aren't that *different*--not to a guy using a *hoverchair.*

You want to figure me out?

BZZT BZZT

Rrff...

I have a *morning routine.* It starts like this.

I push with my right hand onto my left side.

I tuck in my left arm.

Swing my right over my body.

Push up a little with the right.

Slide the left under so I'm on my elbow. Push with both hands...

...and now I'm sitting up. It takes *five seconds*--I barely think about it.

I'm *awake.*

But it's a set of movements I have *learned.*

My *physicality* is something I've learned. Something I've relearned. Something I've *worked for.*

But other things came easier.

My mutant power is ***technology.***

++OUTER HOUSING DISENGAGE++

Any technology you can name, I can control or build from whatever's around. I'm still finding the *limits* of that.

So far, I don't *have* any.

Does that seem ***arrogant*** to you? Should I learn *humility?*

Picture it. As a kid, I could build engines from *junk*--but I had to convince people I wasn't *stupid.*

Now? I'm second-in-command on a *space station.* I turn eighteen in *two months.*

People tell me I have a chip on my shoulder.

What I *do* have is severe *acquired dyslexia.* Even now, written language is nearly impossible.

Do I seem arrogant to you?

The outer housing of my chair is that big, bulky *Professor X-style*--mutant cultural aesthetics.

Professor X is walking now. I'm not.

Timer for half an hour.

Krakoan medicine helps with the *dyslexia*. But with a ***complete T11 break*** like mine, from so long ago...

...well, the *Healing Gardens* can only do so much.

And I'm not into ***resurrection***--not before I *have* to.

So everyone tries to figure me out.

And maybe that's why I'm going along with this whole *plan*.

Because mutants and humans aren't that different. Because I get the same looks from *both*. The same *whispers*.

Why doesn't he hang out? Why hasn't he lost his death cherry? His mutant name's so cringe. He's so full of himself.

He thinks he's a rock star.

++OUTER HOUSING ENGAGE++

Which, y'know. To be *fair*...

...I absolutely do.

PLANET ARAKKO.
FORMERLY KNOWN AS MARS.

Before we start, I'd like to make something clear.

This was created as a place of *diplomacy.*

DURING AN UNSEASONAL COLD SNAP.

If you have ***grievances***-- with the Shi'ar or with us--we are happy to hear them at any time. Peaceful protest is encouraged here.

If your cause is *just,* we would be honored to lend what political pull we have with the Shi'ar *to* it.

Justice is something *dear* to me.

Warning--

Temperature falling ***below freezing point of neural suspension fluids--***

A-A-AAULIK-KK-K

But so is hospitality.

And I will not abide the murder of guests.

KRUNK

Royalist trash!

You think you're *better?* Think you're so *unique?* **That's fine!**

If you won't come down in the dirt with *us--*

Storm-- careful...

--Mr. Eloquent's atomic chain saw can come to you!

CHOOM

Ah--

Don't trouble yourself, Madame Regent--

--you're in the *Diplomatic Zone.*

SURPH

It's *my* job to take care of the *little things.*

Much appreciated, Frenzy.

And while he's lookin' *your way--*

--this is for Neutron!

Unnnhh!

And then there was one.

Choose your next move with *care,* robot.

You are in the eye of the Storm--and sturdier things than *you* have been torn asunder by its fury...

Noted. Recalibrating for new situation.

Awaiting new protocols...

Play dead, Half-Bot One.

Just for a moment...

Situation untenable.

Shutting dowwnnn...

Ha! Ororo won!

Ororo always wins!

She does make a habit of it. But *this time*...

Let's keep our distance a moment *longer*, Majestrix.

Agreed. I can't say I *trust* such an easy victory.

Frenzy--are you in contact with ***Brand?***

I'm sending the *comm signal*, but she's not picking up. She's... ***offline.***

She's never offline.

...

Something's wrong.

Patch me through to ***Cable*** on ***S.W.O.R.D. Station One***...

PERSONNEL FILE :: "ABIGAIL" / BRAND :: UNRESTRICTED

S.W.O.R.D. PERSONNEL SYSTEM :: Z-2-11 10/15 :: GSTC 0960

"COMMANDER ABIGAIL BRAND" :: LOGGED MOVEMENTS :: UTC 1600 / GSTC 0960

0500 UTC / 0300 GSTC / Quarters	**Wake-up call scheduled, received**
0530 UTC / 0330 GSTC / Mess Hall 1	**Commander consumes Standard Breakfast 7a** *{-hash brown +egg +coffee +coffee +coffee}*
0545 UTC / 0345 GSTC / Jump Suite 1	**Commander ready for transfer to Station 2 ["The Keep"]**
0546 UTC / 0346 GSTC / Jump Suite 2	**Commander arrives on Station 2**
0600 UTC / 0360 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Six-hour Command Shift begins**
0730 UTC / 0450 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Comm link established with Gym 1 [Nathan Summers/Cable]**
0820 UTC / 0500 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Comm link established with Shi'ar Empire/ Chandilar [Kallark]** *Gate Protocols confirmed*
0945 UTC / 0585 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Eden Fesi/Manifold on deck**
1000 UTC / 0600 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Shi'ar Delegation arrive in Diplomatic Zone**
1003 UTC / 0604 GSTC / Command Deck 2	**Comm link established with Command Deck 1 [Nathan Summers/Cable]**
1004 UTC / 0604 GTSC / Command Deck 2	**Enemy incursion begins ["Lethal Legion"]**
1010 UTC / 0610 GTSC / Command Deck 2	**Commander moves to Tech Suite 2**
1015 UTC / 0615 GTSC / Tech Suite 2	**Commander arrives**
1017 UTC / 0617 GTSC / Tech Suite 2	**Discussion with Takeshi Matsuya/Wiz-Kid** *details unlogged at this time*
1#18 UT# / 061# GT#C / #ech Su#te 2	***St#tic dis#uption -- err#r -- sy#tem mal#u#ction***
1019 UTC / 0619 GTSC / Unknown	**System restored -- Commander whereabouts unknown**
1020 UTC / 0620 GTSC / Unknown	**Whereabouts unknown**
1030 UTC / 0630 GTSC / Unknown	**Whereabouts unknown**
1040 UTC / 0640 GTSC / Unknown	**Whereabouts unknown**

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE. "THE PEAK."

...I'm not getting anything *either*, Storm. I agree--it's *worrying*.

I'll keep you posted on this channel.

I'm still getting used to *Old Cable*.

I knew him when he was *my age*--which, by my reckoning, was just a few weeks ago. *Time-travel stuff.*

BRAND

Oh--*hey*, Taki.

Didn't see you come in...

He's the son of *Cyclops*, which makes him *mutant royalty*...

...which got him promoted to a position here he wasn't ready for--***then.***

Unearned *confidence*, hiding a bundle of *nerves*, stretched over a barrel of *imposter syndrome*.

...

*Hey, uh...**Wiz-Kid**, right?*

I can remember what that was like.

Eyes up here, champ.

What do you need?

Since he went to the *future*--since his *future self* was resurrected in the *present*--he's more self-assured. But he treats me like *I've* got all the answers.

I guess that's how he *remembers* me.

It hurts a little to ***betray*** that memory, but...well.

I thought you were on the *Keep*. Something I should know?

That's the ***plan.***

Brand put me in play *here.*

She thinks this ***Lethal Legion*** situation is probably a *distraction* for something *bigger* and *nastier.*

Is that why she's not picking up?

Total comms blackout. We're almost definitely being monitored by the *enemy.*

And none of this is *entirely* a lie...

...even if it's not the *full truth.*

Hm.

You'd think she'd have *told* me.

That's why *I'm* here--to keep you in the loop.

It's the safest way. With my power, I'm a living *surveillance black spot.*

Well, okay then.

After all, if there's anyone I *trust*...it's ***you.***

Well, now I feel terrible.

Which is the *idea*. He wouldn't be *Cable* if he bought my story *completely*.

BRAND

Hey, listen--while you're here, I wanted you to know.

I got word from ***Rocket Raccoon***. The mission you helped with on *Breakworld*--it made *all the difference* against Dormammu.

So, you know, don't get a *swelled head* about it--but you've officially *saved the universe*.

Good work.

He's looking for a ***guilt response***.

Enough *probable cause* to use his telepathy on a *friend*.

...

Taki?

Let's give him what he wants.

What are you--?!

HHHNNGH!

Cable's prosthetics are only *partially* mechanical. The rest is *future tech*--tricky even for *me*--

--mixed with an ***alien techno-organic viral load***.

It's tough to *manipulate*--especially against an opponent with Cable's telekinetic skill.

It's *my power against his*, and I've got less than a second to *work*.

Is that time enough for me to turn his *bionic eye* into an *internal taser?*

--NNAAARRRGHHH!

Time enough to shock the *world's toughest brain* into *losing consciousness?*

Looks like it is.

Which is lucky, since apparently the whole plan relied on *this moment.*

On my *beating* the world's greatest mutant soldier on his *ultimate home ground--his own body.*

Not that there was a doubt in my mind.

Do I seem *arrogant* to you?

Are you trying to *figure me out?*

Open *back door.* Voice code-- *X gon' give it to ya.*

Let's you and me have a little *chat,* S.W.O.R.D. Station One...

Cable? Are you there?

Cable, report in--

Frenzy.

Something's coming.

Incoming message:

Sentients of the Lake Hellas Diplomatic Ring. Sentients of Arakko.

Long-distance translocation is a famously delicate art...

...long considered too risky for large-scale military actions.

Nobody wants their expensive invasion force smeared between atoms when simpler transportation methods exist.

But an inexpensive invasion force? A disposable one?

The cyborgs...

They're walking translocation receivers...

I see.

Then I no longer have the luxury--

"--of holding back."

SHRRAK

Too late. Coordinates locked.

The Lethal Legion is the disposable army of the future.

A perfectly balanced, self-replicating terrorist cell.

Thank you...

...for choosing...

...our product.

OS017-SERIES ENHANCILE CATALOG :: "THE LETHAL LEGION"

Meanwhile, for repeat (and discreet) customers, we can offer *33.3% off* our Premiere Gold service. What do you get at the Premiere Gold level? We're so glad you asked!

At the Premiere Gold level, for every three OS017-Series Enhancile Packages you purchase, we will deliver a fourth at no further cost -- fresh from our cloning facilities and tailored entirely to your specifications.

So Premiere Gold customers already have 25% off on medium-scale orders -- and with a further 1/3 off, you get four Enhancile Packages for every two you buy. In Standard Galactic, the word for that is -- HALF PRICE!

And do you want to go bigger? *Premiere Gold scales as big as your needs.* Do you need four hundred units? Four thousand? Four million? *The cost is still halved -- and we can clone and outfit our enhanciles as many times as you can imagine.*

The "Lethal Legion" is not just a simple terrorist cell.

It's the terrorist army of tomorrow -- *at a price you can afford today.*

You're welcome.

STELLARIS®

We Make Friends.

S.W.O.A.D. STATION ONE.

FZATT

Nnnh!

Electric jolt to the *reticular activating system*...someone wants me up and about.

Is that *you*, Taki? What do you want me to...

...see?

This is **Cable** calling the Jump Suite--I'm seeing *mass evacuation of all station personnel.*

Talk to me.

Cable?

EMERGENCY ALERT

TOTAL E RES

Good news. *George* here's the *last*--we got everybody out just like you wanted.

No golden eggs *today*, Mr. Cable, sir.

What do you mean, like ***I wanted?***

What do *I* mean? What do *you* mean? The order came from the *Green Room!* From *your desk!*

Listen, if you *screwed up* and ordered an evac for *nothing*, I am *not* taking the blame--

Take a *breath*, Vanisher.

I'm still trying to find out what's *happening* here--but I *definitely* don't blame it on *you*.

So *no*, you're not in any--

--*trouble*.

...I take that back.

THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.

And there it goes. I have to say, I'm impressed, Mr. Matsuya.

I'll be honest-- I was expecting you to trick me somehow. Fake a sabotage. But the Peak's leaving orbit, falling to Earth... You did it.

You blew up S.W.O.R.D.-- for ORCHIS.

Why? Why betray Krakoa like this...?

Why, he asks. Even all this wasn't enough to fully prove myself to him.

Of course he wants to figure me out.

Everybody does.

Let's just say I don't see humans and mutants as all that different, Mr. Gyrich.

Xavier and Magneto...they brought Apocalypse in to help run the show. Mr. "Survival-of-the-Fittest" himself.

If that's where their grand experiment is headed?

As far as I'm concerned, the whole island can burn to the ground.

Good. And for the record?

That's exactly what I thought you'd say.

Yeah. I know, Henry.

That's why I said it.

Well...he bought it.

Triple agent unlocked.

When you tell people what they *already think*, they bend over backward to *believe* it. It fits his *worldview* to put me in a *neat little box*...

...but Krakoan medicine *helps* me. And Krakoa doesn't ask about my *insurance plan* first.

I'm ***second-in-command on a space station.*** You think that'd happen somewhere else?

Maybe. He'll be constantly scanning you for *tech*--anything *newly created*, anything *Krakoan.*

And you need to ***let*** him--or it's a *tell.*

So it wasn't the *truth.* But it wasn't entirely a *lie* either.

It's ***your plan.*** So long as he doesn't catch what I *did* bring with me...

He *won't*--if we stick to *translator implants* for ***subvocal communication.***

Mutants and humans really aren't so different. We're all ***Earthers.*** Citizens of the ***Sol System.***

If we think we can bring *everybody* up to where we are--*drag them here* if we have to--is ***that*** arrogant?

Techno-telepathy. I dig it.

And I'm not worried. They're looking for what they understand.

Should we learn *humility?*

They still don't *get it.*

We make technology out of *plants.* Out of *mutants combining their powers.* We can make technology out of *anything.*

Out of the ***particles in the air,*** if we want...

Even so--let's remember to be *humble,* Taki.

After all...

...it's not like *mutants* invented *Pym Particle technology.*

S.W.O.R.D. #10 Variant by InHyuk Lee

Final Frontier

12

KATA TJUTA.

Hey, *Eden!*

Krakoa business?

Hey, Baz. Yeah, it's Krakoa business.

I didn't want to *worry* anybody...

...but I guess it's hard not to notice *S.W.O.R.D. Station One* dropping out of the sky.

On *us*.

Yeah.

You, ah... you *got* it, then?

I'm the ***Manifold***, Uncle. Even got me *space suit* on.

I've got it.

Deadly.

You're ***sure*** though?

You're worse than *Gates*. I've *got* it, Baz.

I've got help on the *other* end too. Ever hear of ***Cable?*** Metal arm fella?

Aw, yeah! *Captain America* for a while!

Nah, that's Winter Soldier.

Cable's the *other* metal arm fella.

The *pouch* fella.

You know I can ***hear*** you, Eden.

Not that I'm not grateful for the *short-notice* assist on your end. We're going to need your unique *skill set* to make this *work.*

The Peak's *thrusters* are dead--and my ***telekinesis*** can't push a *thousand-ton weight* out of Earth's gravity well. All I can do is *guide* it.

And unfortunately, I have a bad case of *techno-organic virus* that I use my TK to keep in check--and *vice versa.*

So when I use *this* much TK...well...

...*things get complicated.*

THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.

Australia?

I thought you said it'd be a *harmless splashdown* in the *Pacific*, Henry!

I know the plan was to give Krakoa a *PR black eye*, but civilians are going to *die* because of this.

What have you *involved me in...?*

You're *right*, James. This...wasn't the *plan*.

Matsuya? Can you *explain* yourself?

You asked me to knock a *space station* out of *orbit*, Gyrich. That's what we call an *inexact science*.

I'm not God...

...merely god*like*.

It's not like we gave him a *warning*, Brand--that's not how your plans-within-plans *work*, apparently--

Wiz-Kid calling Brand via *techno-telepathy*. I am *smiling*, but I'm *deeply terrified*.

Did we just *blow up Australia?*

My *security chief* will have it in hand, Taki.

Stop *fussing*, Wiz-Kid.

All my people were *hand-picked*.

And this is exactly what I picked them all *for*--

--the moment Gyrich showed *his* hand.

All right. Things are going... a little *further* than expected. But the ***plan*** is still the ***plan.***

We're still showing the world the *truth*--that Krakoa *cannot function* as the *sole voice* of a solar system.

And we're showing *other* worlds too.

Gyrich to ***Orbis Stellaris.*** What's the situation on ***Mars?***

The initial *testing phase* yielded excellent results. We are now in ***phase two.***

Even against *unexpected resistance,* I expect objective completion *well* within the allotted *timeframe...*

...

It's just an assassination ***attempt.*** You *understand* that?

We don't *want* a civil war to break out in the Shi'ar system *today...*

Oh, of course, Mr. Gyrich. War is so famously bad for business, after all.

You have my word...

"...*nothing* will happen today that has not been planned for."

PLANET ARAKKO, A.K.A. MARS.
THE DIPLOMATIC ZONE.

Five of them nearly slaughtered us all. How many are there *now?* I've lost count.

It's hopeless. We're doomed.

Gladiator-- *sir*--you don't *mean* that.

I've seen you take on a *hundred* bad guys without breakin' a sweat--

Powered by my own ***self-belief,*** yes.

But my confidence has been *literally shattered* by the enemy's psychic weaponry.

It'll take extensive therapy on *Halfworld* before I can even lift a small *hoverbus*...

Deathbird?

I *heard,* Guthrie.

I'll need all of you to buy time with your *lives.*

I'll circle *around*--take the *Krakoan Gate* back to *Shi'ar space*--

No! You will ***not,*** Deathbird!

Your empress forbids it!

Your *majesty*--there are powerful forces who wish you *dead*--

And if I run *forever?* Rule from *hiding?* How is that not a ***victory*** for them?

We must have a little ***faith,*** Cal'syee. *Faith in the X-Men.*

"Faith in the ***Goddess.***"

...

Back away from the enemy.

All of you.

Xandra's right. We can't--*hff*--***run*** from them. Can't let them have the--*hff*--the *Diplomatic Zone*--

Wait. What's *happening?*

It's--*hhff*--getting hard to--*breathe*--

Yes.

That's the *air pressure.*

The weight of the air. One of the things that make *weather.*

I'm keeping the effect as contained as I can. But exerting my mutant gift to *this extent...it's hard to hold back.*

You're feeling the very *edge* of it. Step *back,* Joanna.

I don't want to kill you.

...

Okay.

Pressure. Pressure building in the air. *High pressure* means *fine weather.*

A beautiful day.

But when the *storm* comes...

...is when the *pressure... suddenly...*

...*drops!*

SFRAK2000

God...

They'll *survive*--if we get them into *stasis.* The *Shi'ar* can take it from there.

Hopefully, their *creator* will learn their *lesson...*

Oh, have no fear, Regent Ororo. I've learned a great deal.

That's what product tests are for...

STELLARIS®
MANUFACTURING

////ORBIS STELLARIS AFTER-ACTION REPORT////
////STARDATE ZETA-TWO-ELEVENTY////REDACTED COPY////

Field-testing of the OS-017 "Lethal Legion" went mostly better than expected.

Faced with an all but impossible task -- the assassination of the Shi'ar Empress -- the basic five-unit cell performed more than adequately. The major success, of course, is the new psychic weaponry, which was enough to remove Gladiator from the field of play. I'll instruct the [redacted] Farm to accelerate production of the necessary materials -- I can see the Orbis Extremis model doing very well in Shi'ar space.

With Gladiator out of the picture, the basic cell was then able to eliminate three Superguardians, as well as two of the local enforcers. Needless to say, even in large numbers, the basic cell was incapable of holding out against an Omega-level mutant Earthling -- but even so, it's a surprising result that points to a growing weakness in Shi'ar superhuman defence.

I wonder if I'm being shortsighted. I can make money selling to anti-Shi'ar interests, but if I wanted to make *real* money... enough to fund, say, the [redacted] Project... it might be worth letting the wider media know the finer details of this battle. If the current generation of Superguardians were past their prime...unable to stand against a simple cell of cyber-terrorists...who would be called on to replace them? Obviously, it'd have to be through a shell company rather than Stellaris itself. But I'm used to a certain level of disguise. Very few people know that I'm originally from Earth, after all.

But then...it could be anyone in here.

On to less exciting matters. The deal with Henry Peter Gyrich was, as expected, mostly useless. He brought nothing to the table beyond his permission to act, which I certainly did not require. If I want a silent partner in the Sol System, it's clear I'll have to look elsewhere.

Which I have done, of course -- but this has already drifted too far off topic.

I'll save the subject of my *new* alliance for the relevant file.

////////////ORBIS STELLARIS Z-2-11////////////

Orbis? Orbis, are you there?

Orbis, answer me--this is Henry Peter Gyrich--

Ouch.

Looks like he's stopped taking your calls.

It doesn't matter. Arakko was a side mission--that's all. A distraction.

Krakoa will still be discredited when the Peak falls to Earth--

You mean when it crashes into a populated area?

You honestly thought this would get my backing, Henry?

You fouled up, as usual--and now you're committing mass murder on a continental scale--

Collateral damage, Hudson! An acceptable loss! For the future of our planet--our very solar system!

And for that--

"--I'll make any sacrifice necessary!"

You all right up there, Nathan?

Self is-- fine--

--I'm fine, Eden. Nothing wrong here.

Just get ready to catch self.

Ohhh-kay...

...

You got it though?

Yeah, Uncle--

--I GOT IT!

"...Okay.

"So when I said I *had* it?"

Nearly didn't have it.

I talk to space. But that was a *big ask.*

Gonna lie down a minute.

Well, for what it's *worth*--now that you've reversed the *direction*--

--I've got it.

It's much easier to push *with* momentum than it is to pull against it. I can get the Peak back in orbit from here.

That *said*...

...it wasn't without *cost.*

Yeah? You *all* right?

And don't say "*self* is *fine.*" I'm asking *you,* Nate.

I can commit my *telekinesis* to controlling my *techno-organic viral load* again. My *first-person singular* is back on track.

But am I *all right?*

I guess we'll see.

Over and out.

"This is over, Gyrich."

Three Shi'ar delegates *dead*, from a scheme *you devised*--and we're lucky they're the *only* casualties. Department H is going to hear *all about* this.

Don't be surprised if you're *relieved of command* here...

Somehow, I doubt it. You're being *naive*, James--extreme measures are *more* than justified in the face of Krakoan expansionism.

ORCHIS understands how *dangerous* this new mutant nation is...

You're damn right we're dangerous, Henry.

Dangerous to people who murder our *guests* on our *watch*. Or did you think I was going to keep on *smiling* about that?

Matsuya...? But you--*you blew up S.W.O.R.D.*--

I've blown up a *lot* of things.

Here's a fun fact: *Charles Xavier can't design hoverchairs.* This thing's not made for tight corners.

But it *is* made for smuggling in everything I need to *hack your systems*. Too bad you were scanning for *Krakoan* tech--mine's *better*.

I've just finished downloading *everything*, Henry. Every secret file, every dirty deal.

You're *right* though--I don't think *Department H* will do much with it.

That's why I'm sending it straight to the ***Shi'ar***.

Start *running*, Henry.

I--I need to speak to *Doctor Devo*--yes, *immediately*--

I told you! This is *Gyrich!* ***Gyrich of Second Petal!***

I need immediate extraction!

What do you ***mean*** he won't take my call--

Gaah!

THOOM

Please! The *technopath*-- he's got me *trapped on my own station*--

ORCHIS *can't* cut me loose ***now***--

They *can't*...

For the record, Henry...

...it was *my* station *first.*

Brand. Of course...

I told Wiz-Kid to concentrate on backing up the *data*--that you were running to trigger a *deletion protocol.*

We both know you were only trying to save *yourself*...but it'll keep him busy for a few minutes.

Plenty of time for the two of us to *talk.*

What's there to say? You *stole* Mars from humanity. You're trying to conquer the solar system.

This path you mutants have chosen--*without consulting anyone, I might add*--it's putting us *all* in danger.

Krakoa isn't *built* for the stage you've put it on, Brand--

Oh, I agree.

It's not ready at *all.*

What...?

I don't have a problem with you and ORCHIS taking out *Krakoa,* Henry.

Honestly? It's what *needs* to happen--and ***soon.***

But I have a problem with you being so ***bad*** at it.

Making *Wiz-Kid* your man on the inside?

He was an Avenger for *two minutes*, Henry. He's been a *mutant* all his life.

Like I've been a *spacer* all mine.

I might have mutant DNA, but I was born and raised on *Axus*.

Nobody on Krakoa's ever *asked*, of course.

They don't even know what my *name* is.

Brand's a *codename*. Because my hands heat up, you see.

This defines me in *mutant culture*, apparently.

As if mutants aren't just another flavor of *Earther*...

I *needed* Krakoa for a little while--to make the Sol System a *serious player* in the *great game*-- but ***now***...

...like you said, the stage is a little too *big* for Erik and Charles and all their *drama*.

Or poor, sweet *Hank*. Trying so *hard* to be the necessary monster.

Storm... maybe. *She's* got some steel.

But if she's still respecting *Arakko's* customs instead of imposing her *own*...

NO, I think Sol's better off if I get rid of them all and run things *myself*.

Don't you?

Anyway.
Time for you to leave us.
DIT!
What? What do you...?
NO.
NO, no, no. NO--
SHHH
You can't! You can't do this!
The X-Men have laws--
"Kill no man." Don't remind me.
I don't play by rules I don't *respect*, Henry.
I've made it look like *you* pushed the button. Like you were *in control* at the end.
That's me being *kind*, so I hope you appreciate it.
Please! PLEASE!
OPEN OUTER AIR LOCK DOOR
OPEN INNER AIR LOCK DOOR
And don't worry about your spot in ORCHIS, Henry.
It's in the best possible hands.
DIT!
OPEN INNER AIR LOCK DOOR
OPEN OUTER AIR LOCK DOOR

Brand?

This can't be right-- I'm reading that an *air lock* in that section's *fully open*, and--

Brand, it's telling me Gyrich has *left the station.*

Where's *Gyrich,* Brand?

What just happened?

BEYOND DEEP SECRET::
DNA/AETHERIC MATCH ONLY

[DE. .[ep]__OX]
[SEC .[ret]_11]

Once again, I'm keeping this private record so that -- in case of a sudden resurrection in my near future -- I know exactly what I've done and what I haven't.

So. What *have* I done?

I blasted Henry Gyrich out of an air lock, that's what. And frankly, I don't feel a bit bad -- Henry's had something like that coming to him for a very, *very* long time. Of course, I faked being annoyed about it -- I don't think Taki would have bought "genuinely upset."

Obviously, it breaks mutant law -- that charming little fiction Krakoa pretends has weight -- and if anyone found out, it'd make things very awkward. Hank might let me off, but I can't see anyone else giving me the benefit of the doubt. Even Erik -- I think, strangely, he'd take it worst of all. He really believes in Krakoa... Glorp help him.

Of course, the real danger of Krakoa turning on me before I'm ready would be the chance of bigger dominoes falling. Krakoa is nothing -- useful dupes in the larger scheme -- but if the Shi'ar learn that I knew exactly what Orbis Stellaris was planning? If they understood that Empress Xandra dying would be a win condition for us both? *Then* I'd be in trouble.

Speaking of win conditions -- the falling S.W.O.R.D. station worked exactly as I hoped. Cable's techno-organic viral load is just barely under his control now -- perfectly balanced between killing him, which would put things back at square one, and being too weak in his body to make use of. I could have lived with the station crashing into Australia, as well -- it'd accelerate the downfall of Krakoa, but that needs to happen anyway. Still, I'm glad it didn't come to that -- Taki's potentially dangerous, but he's a little too useful right now to go in the hole.

Who does that leave? James Hudson is in my pocket. If he ends up as head of Alpha Flight -- assuming Alpha Flight survives the interstellar scandal -- all the better. But I've learned not to try to predict such things. I don't think he's a big fan of ORCHIS anymore though.

Which is ironic... because ORCHIS are big fans of me. That's what Gyrich got wrong, in the end. Having a mole on the inside? Just a double cross waiting to happen.

But being your own mole on the inside...

...now *that's* got potential.

[D_[en]Y..... ..[00]
[EVE_r[yth]ING..[11]

It's not about what's *happened*, Taki.

It never is.

It's about ***what comes next...***

S.W.O.R.D. #11 Variant by Paul Renaud

The Broken Land

13

JUST BEFORE THE FIRST HELLFIRE GALA. WHEN ARAKKO WAS STILL AN ISLAND.

NAMELESS. THE SHAPE-SHIFTER QUEEN.

HOLDER OF THE SEAT OF ALL-AROUND-US. REGENT OF ARAKKO.

I! AMM! YUU!

DEFENDING HER TITLE IN THE CIRCLE PERILOUS.

N-no-- because--

--if you were--

THUKK

--you'd have killed me already.

WHOO

ORORO. THE STORM.

THE CHALLENGER.

LYAR. YUU ARR NOTT KWIK TU KYLL.

I AMM SHAYPSHIFTUR OMEYGA. I BEKUMM YUU. I AMM YUU.

YUU IN YURR PRYME! YURR BESST SELLF!

WENN YUU WERR KLEEN!

NOW YUU ARR TAYNTED BY THE WURLD.

SEDUSSED BY POWRR!

BY CROUNS NND THROWNS!

KRAKOOM

BUT ARAKKO DUZ NOT BELONNG TU YUU, OR-OR-O!

YUU DID NOTT SUFFRR IN THE PRIZONS! YUU SHEDD NO BLUDD ON THE BATTELFEELD!

YUU WERR NOTT THERR!

I was fighting battles you know nothing of. Living a past you stole the *wrong face* from.

For if you have *youth*, Regent Without A Name...

...I have *experience.*

Enough to *freeze* your fluid flesh. To chill your blood until it no longer *responds.*

You're *right* that I have no desire to kill you-- but you *cannot defeat me.*

So yield-- and let me take your seat.

ARAKKO... IS NOTT...*YURRS.* YUU WERE...NOTT *THERR.*

YUU...WANNT TU BEE...*OV ARAKKO?*

KNOWW THE COSST.

KRA-KOOOM

Ororo?

Your majesty?

THREE DAYS AGO.

THE GREAT RING OF ARAKKO.

Apologies.

I was lost in thought.

No doubt weighing the *decision* we are all about to take.

Our *future*... It will be war or peace. A return to *Amenth--to destroy our ancient enemies*, as the law of Genesis demands--

--or a *new beginning*, here on this new planet.

I suspect the *final* responsibility will be in *your* hands, *oh Queen of Arakko.*

Regent of Arakko.

We are a *council*, Isca. The decision should not be mine alone.

Oh? Would that not *please* you? After you went to such *trouble?*

Isn't your throne *comfortable*, oh Voice of Sol?

Isn't this what you *wanted?*

NOW.

THE PLANET ARAKKO.

ONCE KNOWN AS MARS.

Excuse me?

Is this land *yours?*

Speak *sense.* It's *everybody's.* That's how land *works.*

I'm *walking* on it. You can *too* if you'd like, though it seems you're fine without.

But if you want it *just for you* to walk on, Silverhair... well, *then* we've a ***problem.***

Do we have a problem?

My ***name,*** fisherman...is ***Magneto.***

And I am *unused* to being *threatened* by--

I'm sorry.

It's ***Max.***

My name is Max.

This island continent seems...***secluded.*** I was hoping to build a home here.

This can be that, if you keep an open door.

And if you're not one for *crowds*... well, there's ***me*** here, but not many else. Most like the *mainland*--less travels to get a where.

If ***alone's*** what you need, here you can find it.

Good.

That's good.

...

You want to talk about it?

I thought Arakko *frowned* on weakness...

Hah! You Krakoans think a *lot* about us. And know a *little*.

Speaking pain's *weak*, is it? How's *that* sense, Max?

How can you be strong if you won't heal what's *broken?* How do you *heal* without saying where it *hurts?*

Say it, then.

Speak the pain ***aloud.***

...

What's there to say?

I tried to *build* something, fisherman.

A great work. *The* great work.

A dream of something *perfect.*

Something to balance all I'd *lived* through...

...all I'd *lost.*

--it broke *apart.* Shattered to *pieces.*

And they cut me to the heart.

But when I tried to wrestle my dream into the *world--*

--to make it ***real***--

... There are those who see me as a monster. And I can pretend they never *knew* me.

But if they see me as a *fool*--as a ***failure***-- what can I say to *that?*

What can I say to the ***truth?***

There's *nothing* to say. Nothing *in* me. Nothing *left.*

What you see here?

This latest ***great work*** I've embarked on?

That they were not ***there.***

A comfortable grave for me to die in.

No more than that.

THE AUTUMN PALACE.

PORT PROMETHEUS SPACEPORT.

See, this is a *nice place.*

The ***Red Lagoon***...it's a *start,* you know? A nice little *investment.*

But at the end of the day, it's a spaceport bar. I need somewhere with *acoustics.* This planet needs a *party palace.*

I want to be the *David Mancuso of Mars...*

Planet Arakko.

And I have no idea who that is.

Arguably, he helped make the dance floor what it is today. Ever danced to *disco,* Kobak Never-Held?

I have never danced to disco, Roberto Da Costa.

I was born as the *final siege* raged, over a century past. My *first love* died in the prisons.

His name was ***Tarlo.***

We thought against the ***Vile***--and when they came for us, he took it on himself.

I wept for a year. I've shed no tear since.

...

My first love was named ***Juliana.***

She loved me against all odds. Saw something in me I'd not yet seen in *myself.*

Then she died to save my life.

So I *live.*

Here's to the business of living, Kobak Never-Held.

To your pain and mine, Roberto.

I see you--and you've a *place* in the ***broken land.***

Which is *great,* obviously--but *I* need to know if *Nile Rodgers* has a place in the--

Don't you know who I am?

Eh?

I--I have *diplomatic immunity,* Sir, granted by the Regent of Arakko *herself.* The immunity protocol was voted through by the *Great Ring.*

While in the *Diplomatic Zone,* I--I am *immune to challenge--*

Immune to...? Do you think me *Arakkii?*

Am I already forgotten?

Sir, please-- Shi'ar d-diplomacy *demands* c-certain-- certain *vagaries* in what can *officially* be *recalled--*

Your-- your face is *familiar*, I admit, but--

Aaahhh!

Because *I am him!* The one you *fear* and *adore!*

I am Vulcan!

I led the Shi'ar Empire to *true greatness!* I am fire--and I *never died!*

I NEVER DIED!

I *heard* how Gladiator usurped my throne. How he gave it to *Lilandra's* line--to *Xandra Xavier.*

But it *wasn't his to give*-- because *I NEVER DIED--*

P-please!

Yesss. Beg for *indulgence* from your king. That's *good.*

Perhaps... perhaps it was *fate.* I am a *Summers...*

...and every Summers *must* kill his *Xavier,* in the--

Okay. The name's Da Costa. *Roberto* Da Costa. *This is my bar.*

And I don't like *shenanigans* in my bar--at least, not ones I didn't *start.*

So. Is this what we'd call a *shenanigan,* Mr. Summers?

Da Costa. I've *heard* of you.

You own the Red Lagoon?

Step *one* of my larger plan. Between you and me, I'm thinking Arakko is the place for a major *disco resurgence.*

I'm not even joking.

Anyway-- that makes that nice young gentleman a *customer.*

And 'round *here,* the customer is...

...king...?

King. Yes.

I've heard of you, ***Sunspot.*** You're powered by *solar energy,* like *me.*

But I don't *have* to take mine from the *sun...*

...when I can take it from YOU!

Energy construct fist. Not bad.

But I've fought without powers *before*--

Have you?

How did that work out?

WHAM

Ugh. A *weapon-thief.*

Can't fight a fair challenge...

You-- you have powers *too*--you have to *do* something--help your *friend*--

Help Roberto? In a *one-on-one fight?*

I'm not going to *insult* a man I've only just *met.*

Look at you. Who are you? With your human suit, your human money, your human bar--what are you doing on the mutant planet?

I know why I'm here. I am a king--the fire of empires.

And I am a Summers.

Krakoan royalty...

...Eh?

You're a Summers, huh?

You know Cyclops?

He's my brother.

Can I...help you with something...?

Sure.

You can tell your brother I said go himself.

WHAMMM

I--I know you. *John Proudstar--* ***Thunderbird.***

One of the *also-rans* who left me on Krakoa to *die--*

Thought you were Krakoan *royalty?*

Whatever. Sorry I didn't catch you *last time,* big man--

--I'd have snapped your pencil neck when I had the chance!

KRAK

BOOOO!

No help, no hindrance!

It's not your challenge, Krakoan!

Who are you calling *Krakoan--*

That'll do, Proudstar.

You've made your point.

Abigail Brand, S.W.O.R.D. Commander. We got word an Earth mutant was threatening Shi'ar dignitaries in the Diplomatic Zone.

That makes it *my business.*

Then I guess I took care of your business, lady.

I--I will *become a sun before you--I will burn this world--*

--unnhh...

Don't mind *me*, Uncle Gabe. I'm just telekinetically blocking your *carotid artery* for a second.

Sleep easy.

He's getting *worse.* All the *Shi'ar* in town...that thing with *Petra* and *Sway*...

What thing?

It's a long story. He's not welcome at the *Summer House*--but even so, maybe *Dad* can get through to him.

...No. Let's bring him up to *S.W.O.R.D. Station Two.*

I think what he needs is some *useful work.*

What?

You want to give this creep a *job?* If I hadn't *taken him out--*

We'd have resolved the situation *peacefully.* And with a lot less *damage.*

You need to start watching your *temper,* Proudstar. It's gotten you killed *once...*

That a *threat,* scarface? You wanna back it up?

There you go again. Misplaced aggression.

You could learn a *lot* from your *brother--*

YOU.

...

Excuse me?

You got metal *ears* too? I said [redacted] *you.* You, Frost, Xavier--*all you vultures.*

I'm *proud* of Jimmy. Proud of what he made of himself.

But do you *really* think I'd have let you turn him into your ***soldier*** if I'd been there to *stop you?*

But you *weren't* there, were you, John? Not for *James.* Not for *anyone.*

You had better things to do.

You had a plane to catch.

Say that again, you son of a--

Enough. Both of you.

Cable-- get Vulcan into the brig. I've got places to be.

And as for *you*, Proudstar--you can take the next gate back to *Earth*. I'm *rescinding* your Martian privileges.

I go where I please, lady.

By all means, *try*.

Well, *I'm* happy to have you here.

If you're ever on Arakko *again*--

Oh, I'm gonna be.

One-Eye Junior just made it *real* personal.

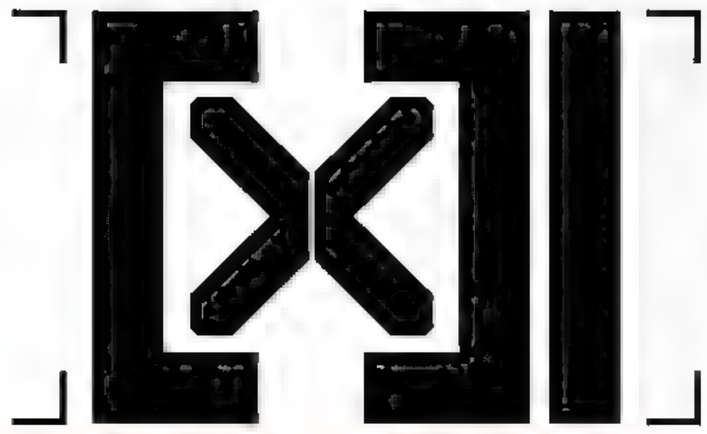
But if *you're* sticking around...*watch your back*, kid.

Doesn't take *my* senses to smell how this place is ***rotting from the head down.***

No.

No, it does not.

[OO.GREAT....O]
[OO.RING.....O]



THE NINE SEATS OF THE GREAT RING, AND HOW THEY VOTED

THE VOTE WAS FOR THE ARAKKII TO RETURN TO AMENTH AND FACE THE DEMONS ALONGSIDE GENESIS, OR TO REMAIN ON THE NEW PLANET ARAKKO AND BUILD A NEW LIFE.

TO MAKE WAR OR TO MAKE PEACE.

ISCA THE UNBEATEN SITS IN THE SEAT OF VICTORY.

Isca has never lost. Isca cannot lose. Millennia of endless life and endless victory have made her jaded, sharp and cruel. Genesis went to Amenth with all her family bar Isca, and there is a reason for that, for Isca will always be on the winning side -- and so can never be trusted. **She will be the hero of her own story even as she stabs you in the back.**

ISCA ABSTAINED FROM THE VOTE.

IDYLL SITS IN THE SEAT OF STALEMATE.

Idyll sits in silence, giving no prophecy since Tarn cut out her tongue. But she knows all that is coming. She knows which way the vote will go, and the terrible things Arakko will endure as a result. She knows the day, hour and minute of her death. She knows which of the Great Ring will kill her. **She waits for the stalemate to end.**

IDYLL VOTED FOR WAR.

TARN THE UNCARING SITS IN THE SEAT OF LOSS.

Tarn is an apt choice for the seat of loss -- for he was the Great Genomic Mage of the Vile Schools when they brought the Ten Towers low and raised the Abyssal Prisons in their place. That Tarn holds a seat on the Great Ring -- despite the endless attempts to remove him -- is a grotesque insult to all who endured his tortures rather than bend their knee to Annihilation. **And that is why Tarn took it in the first place.**

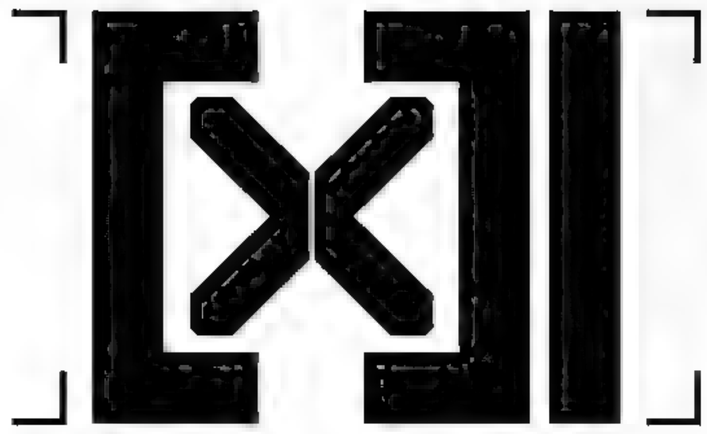
TARN VOTED FOR WAR.

LACTUCA SITS IN THE SEAT OF ABOVE-US.

Lactuca is the Knower -- the Omega Mutant of Universal Shaping. Her face may not be seen. She does not talk to space. **She sings.**

LACTUCA VOTED FOR PEACE.

[0.3].....Dawn]
[0.6].....Day]



ORORO OF THE STORM SITS IN THE SEAT OF ALL-AROUND-US.

Ororo was not of Arakko, but made a new sky for Arakko to stand strong beneath. Ororo was not of the Great Ring, but claimed the noontide seat of the Regent, with its second vote, and held it against all who'd stand against her. **Arakko sees her -- and she has a place in the broken land.**

ORORO VOTED FOR PEACE.

SOBUNAR SITS IN THE SEAT OF BELOW-US.

Son of Sobunar, daughter of Sobunar. Sobunar is the first of his line in thousands of years to free the ocean within and know the pulse of a world. **He feels the tide of change in his veins and will not turn back to old shores.**

SOBUNAR VOTED FOR PEACE.

ORA SERRATA SITS IN THE SEAT OF LAW.

The secrets of Ora Serrata are not ours to tell.

ORA SERRATA VOTED FOR WAR IN ABSENTIA.

XILO SITS IN THE SEAT OF HISTORY.

First Defender of the Broken Land, Xilo is a mutant in the form of an insect collective. The collective has persisted for thousands of years, gone through many changes and had many names, but the history they keep remains...**and they remain the First Defender.**

XILO VOTED FOR WAR.

LODUS LOGOS SITS IN THE SEAT OF DREAMS.

Lodus Logos speaks in metal. Lodus Logos speaks in song. Lodus Logos' time is coming. **Lodus Logos has not long.**

LODUS LOGOS VOTED FOR PEACE.

WITH THE VOTE TIED, ORORO OF THE STORM USED HER SECOND VOTE FOR PEACE.

THE VOTE GOES TO PEACE.

The opinion of the Night Seats is unrecorded.

THE GREAT RING. NOW.

Another session on the *Table Day's* business. The dry, dusty business of *peacetime*...

Is *this* the paradise you wanted, wind-walker? A paradise of *paperwork?*

If it's *battle* you crave, Isca, then **Redroot** still languishes in *Otherworld*...

Redroot made her bed. That was the law of **Genesis**--*any taken alive must free themselves to redeem themselves.*

My sister understood *strength.* I should have gone *with* her when she returned to Amenth to face the demons...

It was *your* abstention that allowed me to decide the issue--*by Arakko's own law.* Just as you abstained on relocating Arakko to this planet--a similar tie, as I remember.

Had you chosen to vote on *either* of those...

My mutant weapon is ***not to lose.*** *If* I voted, the vote would *always go my way*--and I prefer to keep *that* powder dry.

No, the responsibility for this lies with you, Ororo of the Storm. *You* brought us to this new world. You brought us to this era of ***peace***--*and all it may bring.*

You are the ***Regent.***

This is *your* planet.

We're just the people who live here.

ARAKKO IS NOTT YURRS!

YUU WERR NOTT THERR!

Storm?

Abigail.

I was just in the *Red Lagoon*, and...let's just say I felt the need to speak to the ***Queen of Mars.***

The *Regent of Arakko*, Commander.

If you say so...your *majesty.*

Let's walk and talk.

When Krakoa *colonized* Mars--

I'll stop you there. Krakoa never colonized *anything*, Brand.

This wasn't someone's *land*-- it was *dead rock*, until *we* gave it a chance to live and thrive.

What Krakoa did here was ***resurrection.***

When Krakoa ***appropriated*** Mars, it was a solution to a *problem.*

What to do with an island full of ***violent morons*** who live to cause ***trouble.***

A few groups of roaming *bandits* don't represent an entire *society*--

Roaming bandits with *high-level mutant powers.* That represents a *danger.*

I've got the *Head of the Great Ring* quoted on file, saying Krakoa should have ***conquered the Earth...***

I'm a little tired of all Isca's *big talk,* Abigail.

She fought ***against*** Arakko, all through the war--why is she treated as the voice of the people now?

Why are *you,* Voice of Sol?

The *point* is-- Arakko needs a *controlling influence.*

And I think that's a job for the ***X-Men.***

Excuse me?

Cultural ambassadors, setting a good example--isn't that what the X-Men have always been? Isn't that what they are now?

I'm proposing an X-Men of Mars, along those lines. You'd be the leader, of course...

No. I don't think so.

Find someone else.

Think it over, at least. After all, it's what you're already doing, isn't it?

That's what you are...

...your majesty.

Taking a position of power... imposing your will, deciding what's right and wrong for this culture...

That's what a queen does, Storm. That's what a queen is.

Is that what you see?

A throne. A crown.

Is that all that's left?

Was I this in the crowds of Cairo? On the rooftops of Tokyo?

When I laughed in the skies and gave rain to the soil, did it only lead here?

To this...*piece of gold...?*

SEDUSSED BY POWRR.

BY CROUNS AND THROWNS...

So you say, ghost. ***But I say no.***

I say I'll be *free* of that cage--*and this planet with me!*

I say--

--NO THRONES ON ARAKKO!

KRAKROOM

For there are *greater* things to be than a queen.

THE DAY PASSES.

Well. Not a bad *castle* you've built, Max.

Maybe a little *austere*...

I'm the master of *magnetism*, not the master of *carpeting*. I'll work on the decorations in due course.

Unless you have the power to conjure *scatter cushions* from the air? We could make it a *challenge--who can create the softest furnishings...?*

Ha! You'll be an Arakkii yet, Max.

That's a nice open door.

If I'm to have guests, I should learn their names. I've been *rude*.

Not really. My name's *long gone*, you see. Most call me the ***Fisher King.***

We should roast *this* one before he gets much older...

The *Fisher King?* I'll have to tell Elizabeth Braddock when I see her.

And your power is...*what?* Mental command of *marine life?* Psychic *nets?*

You mean my *mutant weapon?*

Funny thing.

Never had one.

You're *human?*

Of course not. Humans are from ***Earth.***

I was born in the ***prisons.***

But--you *live* among the Arakkii? Without *powers?*

It's not ***powers*** that make Arakkii.

I was born in the prisons. I grew up *tortured by the Vile.*

My own *daughter* took their bribes...but I *fought...*

...it was *war,* and I fought. ***I was there.***

But I *see* you, my friend. You've a *place* in the broken land.

You were somewhere too.

...

Yes.

But it's not something I care to--

Eh?

Wow.

The *acoustics* here are ***fantastic.***

Could use a few *scatter cushions*, maybe.

Sunspot?

How did you even know I was *out here...?*

Ways and means, Erik. Eyes and ears on the comings and goings.

Any objection to me turning this into a *disco palace?* I promise we'll play *oldies...*

Tuck your shirt in.

Have you been *fighting?*

Not well *enough*, Headmaster. In the *Danger Room*, I'd score a *D-* at best.

On that note, I've got a *proposition...*

Wait, wait. You're *Max* and you're *Magneto* and you're *Erik* and you're *Headmaster?*

How many names do you *have...?*

Too many.

I don't know what you *want*, Roberto--but I fear I'm no longer the man you ***need.***

I'm *done* building utopias.

Is that so?

Then you're ***exactly*** the man I need.

Abigail Brand is up to something. She always was, if you were looking--I do more looking than people think--but now she's being more open.

She's got a plan for Arakko...a utopia to build...

...and Arakko has no say in it.

I've been there before too. Won't end well.

Right. So Mars needs X-Men, Headmaster.

Are you two in?

I'm in.

In fact, I was coming here to suggest something similar...but not the X-Men.

This is not Mars. This is Arakko. To defend it, we must be of Arakko.

...

Then what is the balance?

Who defends the broken land?

Brand is the one looking for X-Men. And she'll find them.

So Arakko needs to balance that.

The Brotherhood does.

Man on Fire

14

THE SUMMER HOUSE. ON THE MOON. SOME TIME AGO.

"HE HAS *FIRE* WITHIN HIM..."

TRUE POWER INSIDE A *BROKEN* AND *TWISTED* HOST...

YES. BUT HOW *BROKEN*...

...AND HOW *TWISTED?*

WE'RE GOING TO RELEASE YOU BACK INTO YOUR UNIVERSE. THEY WILL SEE YOU AS CHANGED-- *REBORN, HEALTHY AND WHOLE.*

BUT THAT IS JUST A *SHELL.* UNDERNEATH IT-- BURIED ALIVE IN A *SHALLOW GRAVE--*

"--IS THE *REAL YOU.*"

Is it happening now?

Hey.

Emperor.

Don't call me that.

You got *visitors*, Emperor.

Margarita?

It's not even lunchtime, Gabe.

I have to keep the fire down *somehow*, brother. Especially if I have to talk to *him*.

Why is Xavier *here...?*

It's about the ***Waiting Room.*** The *"mutant afterlife"* Wanda helped build for us.

While you were drunk.

We now have a way to reach dead mutants from *before* Cerebro achieved full resurrection functionality, Gabriel.

Thunderbird, for instance. Or poor *Changeling.*

Or... *Petra and Sway.*

...

Petra and Sway are right here.

Aren't they?

[X]....Quiet]
[....Council]

THE QUIET COUNCIL OF KRAKOA

NOTES RE: VULCAN/GABRIEL SUMMERS :: CHARLES XAVIER
FOR DISTRIBUTION TO ALL COUNCIL MEMBERS

Scott Summers has asked me to prepare some notes vis-a-vis the current situation regarding Gabriel Summers for the attention of the Council, and while I believe the matter to be well in hand, I do think it would benefit us all to be on the same page.

Put simply, Gabriel's mental state has become a serious cause for concern -- and the most obvious symptom of this decline is the presence of "Petra" and "Sway" in the Summer House.

When Vulcan first conjured energy constructs of his dead friends, it was an impressive, if unsettling, feat of mutant power. When he refused to accept that they were constructs -- when he became violently angry at the notion that they had not been resurrected as surely as any whose minds were actually stored in Cerebro -- the Summers family and I found ourselves at something of a loss.

I chose to believe -- perhaps foolishly -- that this was a healing process of sorts. A subconscious expression of grief that it was better to indulge than interrupt. In all other ways, Vulcan's nature had changed for the better -- surely this macabre shadow play would run its course as his mind healed further? Why risk an intervention that would surely do more harm than good? So I prescribed cautious observation. I even allowed "Petra" to visit Krakoa -- to teach a class of students! -- in the hope that this might be a way for Vulcan to lose his distrust of the island.

I was wrong. Despite my naive hopes, Gabriel has only deteriorated. He refuses to leave the Summer House -- or even the couch -- for days or weeks at a time. He drinks constantly. His imaginary friends call him "Emperor." Even if we were not on the cusp of resurrecting the true Petra and the true Sway -- thanks to the recent creation of the "Waiting Room" -- Vulcan's ghoulish puppet show could not be allowed to continue.

Therefore, I have made plans to once again confront Vulcan with what he's been doing -- and this time, with Scott's assistance and through deft use of my own abilities, to make absolutely certain that he sees the truth for himself.

I have total confidence that we will succeed.

[Subj.....Vulcan]
[Gabriel_Summers]

No.

None of that is true.

Is it? It's *not*, is it?

You tell *us*, Emperor.

We're *here*, aren't we?

Have a margarita.

I'm going to reach into your *mind*, Vulcan. Help you see the *truth*--

You? Help *me?* No. Never again.

I can decide my own truth--

Please, Gabriel. Hold still.

No! This-- this is a violation! I--I am *Emperor Vulcan*--

Get out! Get out of my mind!

GET OUT!

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO– "THE KEEP." ORBITING ARAKKO. NOW.

Now?

Is it happening now?

Vulcan.

There you are.

They've already *forgotten* me, Brand. How does that *happen?*

I left a scar across the ***stars themselves...***

Oh, I remember. And in the *future*...well, who knows? We may have some ***mutual interests.***

But right *now*...you're not currently welcome at the *Summer House.* For personal reasons, you prefer not to set foot on *Krakoa.*

And here on ***Mars***--one of the last places you *are* welcome--you're trolling the Diplomatic Zone stirring up *trouble.*

You need something to put your mind to, Vulcan. Something worthy of a ***Summers brother.***

And this is it.

Meet **X-Men Red.** The X-Men of Mars.

Mentallo. Frenzy. Random. Manifold. And the field leader-- **Cable.**

Field leader? So I'm taking orders from my *nephew?*

I was a *leader of empires,* Brand--and I led from the *front.*

Wonderful. A *team player.*

It's bad enough you're pulling me off *diplomatic work* for this circus, Brand--

This *is* diplomatic work, Frenzy. *Krakoan-Arakkii* relations.

The Arakkii need to know there's a *S.W.O.R.D. team* watching over them.

Why's that, then?

Excuse me...?

I'm with ***Frenzy.*** How's this our remit?

Arakko's got its own *culture,* its own *government...* They want their own *X-team,* they can do it.

The parts we *allowed them* are theirs, yes. The rest is the *Diplomatic Zone.* Mars hasn't left the ***Sol System,*** Eden.

No matter what ***Arakko*** might think.

It's ***their planet,*** isn't it?

I'm out.

You're quitting the squad?

I'm quitting *all* of it. I'm ***done.***

I'll go be an Avenger again or something.

Just like that? Little *drastic,* surely?

You were practically my ***second-in-command...***

Was I?

What happened to ***Henry Gyrich,*** Abby?

I *told* you--Gyrich jumped out of an air lock. I couldn't save him.

I could've.

You could barely move, as I recall...

Oh, yeah. I'd just *caught a space station.*

Just an accident it fell on *my home* after one of *your plans,* right?

A nice, ***convenient*** *accident.*

You know what they say, Abby.

Fool me once.

We'll continue this later.

Cable-- can you *bodyslide* a team this size?

If need be.

Then you're transport. And if you've got a way to make *miniature suns*, you can do *that* too.

And for the record? Let's say--as a *hypothetical*--that I *did* throw Henry Peter Gyrich out of an air lock.

Is there anyone left in this room who'd have a *problem* with that?

CLK-CLAK

All right, then. ***Wiz-Kid's*** minding ***Station One***, so Arakko's got my *undivided attention* today.

Let's see if we have time to get to know each other before--

Looks like I jinxed it.

Apologies, X-Men...

"...but *duty calls.*"

THE MORROWLANDS.
A COMMUNE OF ARTISTS AND POETS, SEEKING NEW PURPOSE ON THEIR NEW WORLD.
BUT THEY STILL REMEMBER THE PRISONS.

//TEST-BED 7C4/PROTOCOL ACTIVE//

//LOCATE INFORMATION//

//LOCATE INFORMATION//

THEY STILL REMEMBER THE WAR.

Not without a fight! You hear me, outworlders? *Arakko is not afraid!*

Arakko is not afraid of a life that ends!

Bodyslide by five.

Brand-- this is ***Cable.*** We have an incursion by the Progenitors.

Progenitors? Those giant weirdos have a name?

What's their *deal?*

The short version? A Worldmind-level civilization of *unethical space scientists* with *computer brains.*

They build artificial *solar systems* in the gulfs between galaxies. Treat entire *worlds* like *petri dishes.*

Last time they made an incursion into *known space,* it took the ***Guardians*** and the ***Kree/Skrull Royal Couple*** to turn them back.

You have your work cut out.

I always do.

From what I remember, that green one's ***Harvester-Class***--high-level telekinetic.

Figure I'm the one to take *him* on...

What the--

//INFORMATION LOCATED//

//INTERFACING//

Aaahhh!

//HARVESTING//

//INFORMATION UPLOADED//

//TRANSMITTING//

Cable--it just *ate your arm--*

No--*hhn*-- it ate my *techno-organic viral load.*

Without that balancing me-- my *telekinesis* runs *out of control--*

//ERROR?/SYST?M D?SRUPTION//

//CRIT?CAL E?%O?////

--but *that's their problem!*

//THREAT DETECTED//

//CALIBRATING//

//END THREAT//

Cable!

Brand-- this is *Frenzy!* Cable's down-- repeat, *Cable is dead--*

Arakkii! Will we let Krakoans give *their lives* for *our land?*

Every drop of their blood shed is a challenge! A challenge by insult!

And Oris Light-Shaper will not yield!

//THREAT DETECTED//

//END THREAT//

She--she barely had a *power!* She made *glowing cubes!*

These idiots don't stand a chance...

This is their *home,* Mentallo. You can't expect them not to fight for it--

Mentallo's *right,* Frenzy.

Vulcan? Initiate *civilian rescue protocol.* Round up the Arakkii and get them to a safe distance.

And *enforce* that distance.

Brand, that's the *wrong move*-- the Arakkii don't see themselves as *civilians.*

We need to work with them--on *their terms*--

"Work with" a *pitiful, powerless rabble?*

Please.

Run and *hide,* rabble.

The *X-Men* are here to *save* you...

Soft Krakoan pup! Who are *you?*

The beasts threaten all *we've built*--and you ***stand in our way...?***

A few meager *shacks*--

Our homes! Our work!

I sang our song at the *final siege,* Krakoan! *Where were you?*

Who are you to look me in the eye?

Your ***emperor.*** And if you want to lose the other eye, you can ***test*** that--

Eh?

Challenge accepted.

Aaahhh!!!

People of the Morrowlands...

...the Brotherhood of Arakko have heard the challenge--and we consider it a challenge to all.

May we answer?

Ororo!

Ororo answered the all-challenge! Ororo who tamed the Circle!

And the Unarmed King is with her... who ruled at midnight...

Unarmed King...? Is that you, Fisher?

It's a form of magnetic levitation--but it's fighting me.

I know asking for help is frowned on here, but if I could get a distraction...

A few old talesmiths spinning their tales, Roberto. It's not to do with the here and now.

That floating head give you any thoughts, Max?

Help's not help when it's all of us--then, it's tactics.

You'll pick up the nuances.

Morrowlanders! Art-makers of Arakko! The Fisher King calls!

Our enemy comes for **knowledge**, and it has *many faces*-- but you've *many talents!* **A fresh new sight for each eye!**

So **pick an eye**--

--and show it all you know!

Ha! I see the Fisherman's mind!

Musicians too! **Raise your cacophonies**--

//EXTRANEOUS INFORMATION//

//PROCESSING/ PR?CESSI?G ER??R//

...

There.

CLICK

--and we'll break the beast with beauty!

Victory!

Hail Arakko! Hail our Brotherhood!

Ah...my *favorite* kind of mission. The kind where I get paid for letting someone *else* finish.

What about *you*, Emperor Snowcone?

Having *fun* down there...?

N-no...

I'm not done...*I never died...*

I NEVER DIED!

Who are you, Arakkii? Who are any of you to challenge me?

I am an *emperor!* An X-Man! A son of Summer!

I am VULCAN-- the son of Mars--

Goddess--

And I am the Mother.

You manipulate *energy--so do I.* You are an *Omega-level mutant--so am I.*

This is not a clash of *mutant weapons.* ***This is a battle of will.***

Feel the *power circle* us--*building* from one to the other. Seeking a *weakness,* a break in our *armor...*

...is the hurricane.

KA-KROOM

No thrones on Arakko, Emperor.

Pass it on.

A *flaw.*

You speak of a *fire* that burns inside you. A *flame dancing in the wind.*

Inside *me,* child...

///BEYOND DEEP SECRET::
DNA/AETHERIC MATCH ONLY///

[DE...[ep]__OX]
[SEC..[ret]_01]

That went relatively well, I thought.

Was I a little worried when the Progenitors arrived so completely on schedule? To the very second? Yes, I was. I'll have to teach Orbis Stellaris something about subtlety -- it can't look too much like I call down threats to Arakko to order. And, obviously, we won't be able to use the Progenitors again for a while, as easy as they are for Stellaris to program. We'll have to think of another intergalactic act of God if we need to do this again in a hurry -- maybe I'll get in touch with that Skrull separatist who's running the Chitauri these days?

Thankfully, Cable won't remember the fine details when he resurrects. Or guess that we staged an alien invasion just to collect data on his techno-organic viral package -- and how he controls it at high concentration.

I've had word from ORCHIS through the usual dead drop. The data went through without a hitch -- together with what they've managed to collect from other sources, it should give them a strong hand to play against Krakoa. And once they've played their cards, I can play mine.

ORCHIS are big thinkers in some ways, frustratingly small in others. It's a straight fight between mutants and humans for them, and if I'm not on one side, I must be on the other -- like their pet Judas in Fourth Petal. I don't think they understand what a truly far-reaching idea looks like...except maybe for Karima. If I'm reading over this from an egg, it might be because I underestimated her.

Like I underestimated Storm.

I called down the Progenitors, got the data and did my best to firebomb Krakoa/Arakko relations a little. A little pressure to push the Arakkii back to Amenth, so I can make proper use of Mars. But I was blindsided by Storm's commitment to the bit.

Something about this role agrees with her in ways I didn't predict. She survived the Circle -- she remains on the Great Ring -- long after she'd served my purpose for her there. Now the Arakkii treat her like one of their own. And in return, she's built a team of her own to protect them for real -- by their own rules -- that makes my team look like...well, like a false flag operation with an X slapped on top of it.

I thought I was getting the Queen of Wakanda -- instead, I got the Queen of the Morlocks. I need to adjust for that. I need to stop trying to work Ororo and start working around her.

And that means I need my own man on the Great Ring.

[D_[en]Y.....[00]
[EVE_r[yth]ING..[01]

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO. "THE KEEP."

Is it happening now?

You're being *healed*, if that's what you mean. And for what it's worth-- I'm *sorry*, Gabriel.

I wasn't using you to your *full potential.*

Yes. The *shell.*

She only fought the shell...

That's one way to put it, sure. You mostly use your power on a *surface level*--which is natural.

Ororo was trained in the use of her powers at the *highest level*--you've been *alone* all these years. Stick with me and I can *help* with that.

Besides... there are ***other*** kinds of power.

I need a man inside the ***Great Ring,*** Vulcan. Someone who sees things *my way.*

And if you want the locals to speak *your* name like they do Ororo's, there's a way to earn that in *one kill.*

By executing their ***bogeyman.***

Arakko's pain has a *face.*

Does it have a name?

It does.

Tarn the Uncaring.

...

NO.

Tarn the Dead.

X-Men Red #2 Variant

by Giuseppe Camuncoli
& Jesus Aburtov

Loss

15

Nathan

Dayspring

Askani'son

Summers.

Cable.

ARBOR MAGNA. THE HATCHERY.

I hope the resurrection process wasn't too *arduous?*

The yolk really does get *everywhere,* Chuck. But my *T/O viral load's* back to normal levels--and I see you installed the ***stealth arm*** as instructed, Hope...

The Five work to *order,* Dad. Just...do me a favor and don't come *through* here again for a while, okay?

Hey, *Junior.*

...

I'll do my *best...*

...but *John* here might have other ideas.

I might. Time we had a little *talk.*

If he's here to cause *trouble...*

It's fine, Hope. I'm in the mood for a little *post-resurrection workout.*

That said...let's settle this away from the delicate business of the *Five,* shall we?

Fine by me.

No need to put your old bones back in the dirt in front of your *kid...*

Ugh. Was Proudstar always such a jackass?

He was always... *troubled.*

I'd never spy into his thoughts, of course. But after so long *dead,* with the world moving on *without* him...

"...I can't help but *worry.*"

Heh. Charles is worried about you.

Baldy and his *savior complex.*

Ready to get down to *business,* Junior?

Always.

CLICK

The *Stealth Arm* is now shielding us from all *surveillance*-- including telepathic--

--while holo-casting a deepfaked stream of you *cursing me out*-- extrapolated from our encounter in the *Red Lagoon.*

That was a very believable *performance* you gave, John. Kudos on your acting skills.

I wasn't *acting.*

I meant every [redacted] word.

And I say there'll be ***consequences*** for it--soon as we fry the *bigger fish.*

What are *you* lookin' at?

Me?

You and Frost...you *used* Jimmy. Put him on *your* path, made him fight in your personal wars. And yeah, I *wasn't* there.

But *I'm here* ***now.***

I'm looking at all this *testosterone* floating about, mate. You could cut it with a knife.

We gonna talk about ***Brand*** today or what?

DESTROY
ENEMIES

SPECIAL CHALLENGE

THE CIRCLE PERILOUS
TODAY AT SUNSET

SON OF SUMMER
PRINCE OF KRAKOA
LOST EMPEROR OF SHI'AR
CO-CREATOR OF OUR VERY WORLD

VULCAN

CHALLENGES TARN

WARDEN OF THE ABYSSAL PRISONS
HEAD OF THE VILE SCHOOLS
ENEMY OF ARAKKO
THE UNCARING

FOR THE SEAT OF LOSS

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGERS WELCOME
FIRST COME FIRST SEATED

DEFEND
THE LAND

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO.
THE KEEP.

Vulcan versus Tarn, today at sunset. Out of a clear, blue sky.

What's your *game,* Abigail?

What makes you think it's anything to do with *me?*

Of all the seats on the *Great Ring,* Vulcan challenges for the *Seat of Loss?* The seat with the *least* cachet?

You know as well as I do that if it was *him* doing the thinking, he'd challenge *Isca*-- or take another shot at *me.*

And he'd *lose.* He knows that.

He'll lose against *Tarn--*

You didn't.*

* In S.W.O.R.D. #8.

Tarn was *arrogant.* He thought stealing my power gave him room to *gloat*--now he knows better.

Instead of gloating, he *kills*-- with a ***single thought.***

You seem *worried.* Is it that you think Vulcan will *lose,* Storm?

Or are you worried he'll ***win?***

I don't know. *Should* that be a worry for me, Abigail?

What ***exactly*** do you plan to do with one of *your people* on the Great Ring?

Our people, surely? Vulcan's a citizen of Krakoa--Krakoan *royalty*, I hear.

And ***Shi'ar*** royalty as well...

He was *once*. Now the Shi'ar won't even officially acknowledge he ***exists***--or ***ever*** existed.

And there's the little matter of ***Empress Xandra*** being on the throne...

Of course. ***Silly me.***

But even *so*--once he's put the most hated mutant on Arakko down like a *dog*, I imagine he'll be royalty *here* too.

Someone has to be, after all.

Meeting *adjourned?* All right, Ororo.

I guess I'll see you in the *audience.*

[S.W.O.R.D._]
[Confidential]

S.W.O.R.D. CONFIDENTIAL REPORT :: TOP SECRET :: EYES ONLY

FROM: MARVIN FLUMM/MENTALLO
TO: COMMANDER BRAND
RE: GABRIEL SUMMERS/VULCAN

Thoughts after an initial mental deep probe -- *hoo boy.* I need you to start paying me danger money.

Look, if I do a deep scan of somebody and I don't want them to know about it, I can only get so much. That's the rules of the game at my level. I've never been one of those telepaths who can just go in and get every thought you ever thunk -- at least, not without you seeing me do it.

The point is -- I know what mental barriers look like. Everybody's got 'em. But this kid Vulcan's got something else.

It's like...I'm the Road Runner. And I'm running down the road towards a big ol' tunnel in Vulcan's mental mountain, all the way to the main brain vein -- and of course I zip right through it. No problem. *Meep meep.* And it's only after I've done it that I realize -- *wait a sec there, Marvin.*

That tunnel was painted on.

The Vulcan we see on the outside -- the guy who's messed up, but you can at least talk to -- that's...a painting of a tunnel in a cartoon. You can go right inside it, you can take a look around, but it's painted on all the same.

It's an illusion. So good it fooled even me -- and that's not the scary part. I think it'd fool Xavier -- I'm pretty sure it did just that. So if a lummox like me is seeing it, it's because it's starting to fail. And that scares me.

Anyway. If you fight Vulcan right now, you're fighting the painting. The real Vulcan is inside the mountain. And I think that's a guy who could maybe beat just about anyone on Mars.

Except maybe he'd incinerate everybody else in a square mile while he did it. Or maybe he'd crack the planet open like an egg. Or maybe he'd blow up the sun.

I don't think we want to break open that mountain, Brand. My advice is to find a black hole and drop the guy in it.

But if you still want him to go up against this guy Tarn...well, the good news is Vulcan's got access to all his powers, even if he isn't dialing them up all the way. Maybe that means he's not going to be strong enough unless we bring a side out of him we don't want to bring out...but he's definitely sneaky enough. I think I could help train him to make better use of what he's got.

Either way -- I'm not joking about the danger money. You want me to get in that head again, I want a raise. Get back to me.

THE AUTUMN PALACE.

You're right that Tarn takes no *risks* these days, Ororo.

He's faced more challenges than ever since you fought him--lot of folk thought they smelled his *blood* on the Circle floor.

But it was their *own--and it spilled by the gallon.* You ask *me,* this Vulcan's dead *already.*

Krakoans make a habit of surviving the impossible, Fisher King--***Vulcan especially.***

If he *wins...?*

A good if to *if* about, Roberto.

Tarn took the Seat of Loss to *hurt* us--to signal our *defeat.* Who kills him will be *hero of our world.*

Should've been *you,* Ororo...

It would have *lessened* me. Tarn *yielded*--and he will ***again,*** with the right pressure.

Does that need to come from *Vulcan* though?

Anyone can challenge for a seat--at *any time.*

Though I hear it's better if you're an ***Omega-level mutant...***

NO.

Absolutely not.

I don't see you on Krakoa *now*. Or frowning at us from *orbit*.

You built a *home* here, and you built it by *our ways*, with a door open to all. You've fought *alongside* us, not *above* us.

We ***see*** you, Max. ***You have a place in the broken land.***

We don't *say* that if it's not ***so.***

Removing Tarn from the board--*from existence*--would pose no moral quandary for me.

But to set me in his *place?* Another *Krakoan,* to push Arakko toward what ***we*** wish it to be?

How does that make our *"Brotherhood"* distinct from ***Brand's...?***

That...means a *great deal* to me, Fisher. In the time I've *known* you, you've become a dear and valued friend.

But even so...does your *single voice* give me the right to act for a ***whole world...?***

I share your reservations, Magneto. And I believe Tarn's blood on your hands would lessen *you,* as well.

But he is a *living reminder* of a ***dark past***--a *thorn* in Arakko's paw, causing pain as long as he stays.

While I doubt Brand's *motives*...removing Tarn from power could make a *difference* here.

Perhaps we owe it to this world to ***try.***

...

You remind me of ***Charles.***

He asked me to try.

To work *with* him...make a *difference.*

So I *worked*-- and together, we built our *nation.*

And *then*... I watched my daughter Wanda build our ***heaven.***

The Waiting Room--that lets us resurrect *all* mutants.

Even mutants who died before their mutant gene *activated* are waiting in that room.

The *hope* that brought me, Ororo.

The *joy,* that those we'd lost were ***no longer lost...***

I think of Wanda as my *child.* But she was not my *first* child.

First was ***Anya...*** *my beautiful Anya...*

...who I could not *save...* who...

...who died by ***fire...***

Anya had no mutant gene.

I will never see her smile again. Never hear her laugh.

For me, our very heaven is a hell.

You...you are on the *Quiet Council*, Ororo--you know the *betrayals* we've suffered. *The whole bloody business.*

But *that* was what finally broke me. That, after *everything*...

No more. No more *councils*. No more damned *utoplas*.

I no longer have the heart.

...

I don't believe you, Headmaster.

Maybe you *want* to quit. To *rest in peace.*

But what you *want* to do and what you *can* do...

...those are *two different things.*

Ask me how I know.

...

You *don't* know, Roberto.

You don't know me at all.

SUNSET AT THE CIRCLE PERILOUS.

Bring up *satellite* feed.

All right, Gabe. Show me what you've got.

You can *do* this...

"...I trained you for it."

I think I'll *melt* you and paint a *canvas* with the goo. Immortalize you in *art*, as well as in your silly Krakoan *eggs*...

I was never in an egg, Tarn.

I never died.

Ah. *Roberto Da Costa*--Ororo's bartender friend.

Isca the Unbeaten, right? I hear you always win. At everything.

They say *love is a battlefield*...

It is the way *I* do it, bartender.

So be on your guard.

Khora of the Burning Heart. Still working for Abigail Brand...?

My mutant weapon is to enhance *other* mutant weapons. It's not *useful* here.

I *miss* feeling useful.

Why? You want me for your faction?

If you'll have us. But we should speak of *that* another time.

You've watched a *lot* of these fights. Does Vulcan have a *chance?*

I watch so I won't miss Tarn's ***death***--but I've not watched it *yet.*

He's a *weapon-thief* and a *body-shaper,* and he doesn't waste time with *either*--not since *you.*

"So I'd call Brand's man a *dead man...*

It is the appointed hour. *Vulcan is present. Tarn is present.*

Begin the challenge.

"...but he's *Brand's man.*

"And whatever else, *Brand is Brand.*

"She wouldn't send him to this without teaching him *something.*"

HNUHH!

Mind-blind.

My weapon. My genomic control. I can't feel it.

What have you done...?

Part of my *gift*...is siphoning *energy*. *Any* energy, if I'm taught how to do it--*and I have been.*

I can eat mutant power, Tarn.

As you were stealing *mine*...*I stole yours.*

Very *clever.*

But I learned a *lesson* recently--from one of your *fellow Krakoans,* in fact. A lesson about *gloating* over a *weaponless foe.*

Allow me to apply it.

Demons of Amenth. *Two weapon-thieves.*

It's a fight!

I'll strip your genes for my *archives*, Summer-son!

Strand by strand--

--with my *fingernails!*

Would that work on *you...?*

My weapon *cannot* be shut off. *I cannot lose.*

Funny. *Neither can I.*

Even when I *do.*

Oh, speak *sense.*

How can you lose *without losing?*

Distorted *cur! Dog of Mars!*

On your knees before your rightful king!

KRAK

Even a *glint* of the glory in this shell would *strike you blind!*

What do you have, Tarn the *Malformed? What do you have to match my fire?*

Face tentacles.

THWP

WRUNCH

K-*kih* yuh--

Uh-- *kih*--

You are allowed to bring *non-mutant* weapons, you know. Didn't you bring a *knife*? Who taught you to *fight*?

Oh, wait, I think I heard the tale--

--you were emperor of the bird people!

KRAKK

And their hollow bones!

And you're their king *still*, or so you ramble! Because *you never died!*

YOU NEVER DIED!

AAHH--

There's a first time for everything.

THOOM

Your challenger is dead! Tarn the Uncaring sits in the Seat of Loss! Praise Tarn!

I am the one who *never dies!* Have you not learned *that?*

What will it take for you to *learn your place? Who will be next to fall?*

Who will challenge me now?

I WILL.

I knew it.

Let me *think* about it...

I wanted to turn *away*. To *ignore* your stain on the planet I gave life to.

But what I *want* to do and what I *must* do are *two different things*...so I offer a *formal challenge*, Tarn.

Here and now.

Poor timing. Tarn's powers are ***returning***--he'll stall another moment, then *slaughter* the old fool...

Sadly, I have to agree, Isca.

I bet you Tarn wins.

You-- you--

I will kill you where you stand--

Hrrk--

Isca! Put him down now--

That's how you lose without losing.

Challenge! Challenge by insult!

HRAARGH!

KRAK

NO!

Isca-- you have gone too far--

Fight me, then! I can never lose!

Don't you understand? Didn't any of you hear what he *said*? What he *did*?

I fought beside Tarn for a thousand years! I know him better than any of you! It should not be like this!

I can never lose!

I CAN NEVER LOSE!

Some commotion in the stands...?

A challenge by insult--no crime was committed. Direct your attention to what matters.

Tarn? Do you accept or yield?

Yes.

Yes, I do accept the--

--challenge--

THUNK

What...? What is this--?

We're allowed *non-mutant weapons,* I hear.

Your control of DNA is *psychokinetic* in nature. My helmet *blocks mental powers.*

And it's made of metal.

Goodbye, Tarn.

This blood on my hand, I accept.

...No.

No, not like this-- please--

I y--

SKLUTCH

And I accept what comes with it.

Magneto sits in the Seat of Loss.

Three Short Stories About Death

16

PLANET ARAKKO.
THE GREAT RING.

Magneto takes the seat of Loss.

And *as* he sits, we must ask the most obvious *question.*

What is the *meaning* of loss?

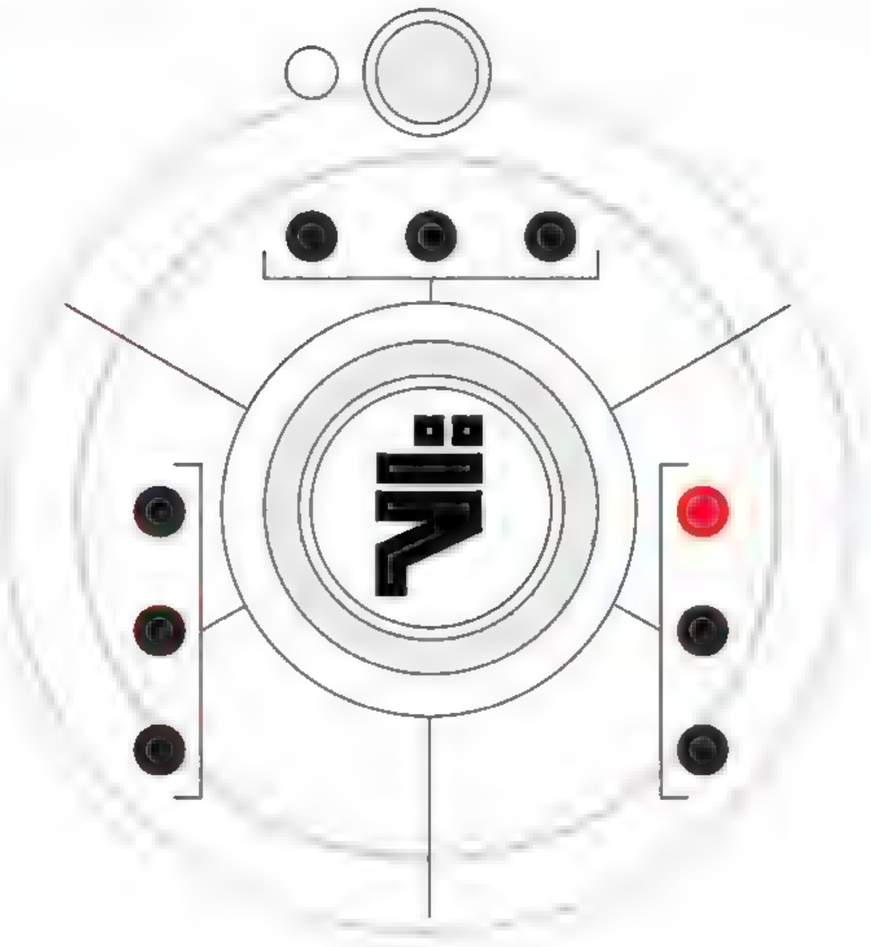
ORA SERRATA, WHO SITS IN THE SEAT OF LAW.

What is the meaning of *death?*

[OO.GREAT....O]
[OO.RING.....O]

THE GREAT RING OF ARAKKO

_THE OPENING REMARKS OF ORA SERRATA.



IN THE CIRCLE, TO LOSE IS TO YIELD -- OR TO DIE.

DEATH, THEN, REPRESENTS A LOSS. IF YOU RISE AGAIN AFTER, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO THE LOSS. IF A MEMBER OF THE GREAT RING FELLED IN THE CIRCLE WERE TO REGAIN THEIR LIFE...THEY WOULD NOT REGAIN THEIR SEAT.

SO IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN. THESE ARE QUESTIONS AS OLD AS THE WHITE SWORD'S ARMY OF RISEN DEAD. THE NEW KRAKOAN AGE DOES NOT GIVE THEM NEW ANSWERS.

THERE IS PRECEDENT HERE -- AND SO THERE IS LAW.

THE ARAKKII DO NOT DESIRE RESURRECTION. THAT IS THE WAY OF THE WHITE SWORD -- NOT OURS. *WE ARE NOT AFRAID OF A LIFE THAT ENDS.*

BUT WE ARE AWARE THAT LIFE MAY END. EVEN THOSE ARAKKII WHO DO NOT AGE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM DEATH IN THE CIRCLE. WE UNDERSTAND THE POTENTIAL COST OF OUR HIGH POSITION.

AND THUS, WE WEIGH EACH DECISION WITH CARE -- KNOWING THAT WE MAY BE CHALLENGED FOR OUR SEATS, AND EACH CHALLENGE WE ACCEPT MAY BE THE LAST.

AS TARN LEARNED, NO ONE IS IMMUNE FROM THE RISK OF DEATH. AND NO ONE SHOULD BE IMMUNE -- FOR WHO FACES THE CHALLENGE WITHOUT FEELING THE RISK?

A POOR CHALLENGER. A POOR RULER.

TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT ENEMY, ARAKKO KEEPS AN OPEN DOOR. THE KRAKOANS ARE AS WELCOME HERE AS ANY, EVEN WITH THEIR WEAK DESIRE FOR A LIFE WITHOUT THE RISKS OF LIFE. BUT SHOULD THAT WELCOME INCLUDE AN OPEN DOOR TO SERVE ON THE GREAT RING?

ORORO AND MAGNETO WON IN THE CIRCLE. BUT DID THEY TRULY FIGHT? WHAT COST WILL THEY PAY TO FIGHT AGAIN?

KRAKOANS HAVE A PLACE IN THE BROKEN LAND.

BUT WE MUST DECIDE IF THEY HAVE A PLACE HERE.

You're saying leadership demands *sacrifice*, Ora.

To lead a people, *one must be prepared to lose*--and lose ***everything.***

Do *you* have an opinion on that, *Isca the Unbeaten?*

I think I could debate the *necessity* of loss, Magneto.

And I'd *win* that debate-- ***as I win all things.***

Yes. I'm ***aware*** of your last "*victory*"-- against one of *my* ***students.***

While my back was turned...

You're ***sure*** you want to bring that up, *Krakoan?*

How you're only *here* because Da Costa used ***my power*** to help you ***cheat--***

Magneto won using his chosen weapon. ***No law was broken,*** Isca.

If Da Costa speaking a few *words* to you could *undermine* that... perhaps ***he*** is not the ***problem.***

Don't cast your evil eye at *me*, Ora. *You may go blind.*

As for Magneto's precious *student*...he's a ***Krakoan.***

They don't ***die*** like we do. That's the *point* of this meeting.

He's probably back ***already...***

ARBOR MAGNA. THE HATCHERY.

Hnn.

Rr.

Uhr?

Roberto?

Roberto Da Costa. Sunspot.

Come back to us.

Da Costa does not die. And **you**, Isca? Do you die like **us**?

Of course I can die, Lodus Logos. I *always win*-- ***no matter the cost.***

I'm sure a poet like *you* can imagine *victory in death...*

Yeszz. But not in the ***Czzircle.***

Can you ever be *removed* from the Szzeat of Victory, Iszzca?

When Genesis returns--or better, when *we* return to ***her.*** This is my *sister's* seat, Xilo.

I only keep it *warm.*

A throne on Arakko, then.

Ororo would have something to say about that.

I'm sure she would-- *if she were here.*

Where *is* our gracious queen?

Elsewhere. She's letting *me* speak for her--in this, we're of ***one mind.***

Elsewhere...?

She's the ***Voice of Sol,*** Isca. Designated *diplomatic spokesperson* for the *solar system.*

Sometimes things come up.

[GALA....[represe]_00]
[CTIC....[ntative]_06]

SHI'AR EMERGENCY DIPLOMATIC MEETING

LOCATION: THE PROSCENIUM.\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
REQUESTED PRIVACY LEVEL: ABSOLUTE.\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
FULL DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES HAVE BEEN INVOKED.\\\\\\\
LISTED ATTENDEES ARE AS FOLLOWS: \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\

Oracle	**SHI'AR EMPIRE**	Superguardian. Aide to the Empress Xandra.	Present.
Dorrek VIII	**KREE/SKRULL EMPIRE**	Kree/Skrull hybrid.	Present.
Supreme Intelligence	**UTOPIAN KREE EMPIRE**	Other-dimensional gestalt intelligence system. "The Plex."	Unable to attend on short notice.
T'Challa of Wakanda	**INTERGALACTIC EMPIRE OF WAKANDA**	The Black Panther.	Present via hologram.
Ororo Munroe	**SOL SYSTEM**	Regent of Arakko. Galactic Council spokesperson for Sol.	Present.
Lactuca the Knower	**ARAKKO**	Requested by Storm as current holder of the Seat of Above-Us.	Refused to attend. Galactic politics deemed *"unimportant."*
Orbis Stellaris	**GALACTIC RIM COLLECTIVE**	Chief Diplomat for the Rimworlds. Businessball. Arms dealer (alleged).	Present.
Richard Rider	**GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**	He stood when all else fell, and we remember.	Present.

THE PROSCENIUM. NEUTRAL DIPLOMATIC SPACE MAINTAINED BY THE GALACTIC COUNCIL.

T'Challa.

Still the ruler of *Intergalactic* Wakanda, I see...

Call it a transitional phase. It's good to *see* you again, Ororo.

I'm missing important business on ***Arakko*** for this.

Magneto knows where I stand--but even so, I'd rather be there *in person.*

Still-- it does give us an opportunity to *talk.* We said "*no secrets.*"

I had to read about *mutant resurrection* in the ***Daily Bugle...****

**See X-MEN #12.*

Oh? Did ***Gentle*** not keep you informed in his *reports?*

It was never about ***state*** secrets, T'Challa. I didn't want the Galactus protocols or the backdoor codes for Kimoyo.

I just wanted the man I still *loved* not to *lie right to my face.*

Instead, you put a ***sleeper agent*** on Arakko, because you assumed I was too stupid to figure it out.*

I *gave* you your chance to come clean. You chose to keep playing your *great game.*

And I won't live on your chess-board.

**See BLACK PANTHER #3.*

No. Neither could ***I,*** in the end.

Nevertheless... ***the game goes on.***

Shall we?

T'Challa of Wakanda and Ororo of Sol-- you're the last to arrive.

We can begin-- and I see no need to draw out the awful truth.

Empress Xandra Neramani of the Shi'ar is dead.

What?

NO...

I... had not heard...

Nobody could have. The only reason I know is because I was hit by the psychic scream she sent out as she died.

The entirety of our empress-- down to the spirals of her DNA--broadcast to the void in the instant she perished.

I saw her *whole life*-- then she was gone.

And... *nobody* knows? Not even the ***Shi'ar?***

Deathbird is missing. But she put the protocol in place.

In the event of Xandra's ***death,*** we shore up support with our *most important allies* before we inform the *people*-- or even fellow ***super-guardians.***

Because when the knowledge is *abroad,* it will mean ***war.***

The Empire is still *unstable.* Her absence will create a ***power vacuum***--a *gold rush* for the throne.

Colony worlds will be forced to *choose sides* between the various factions jockeying to *take her place.*

If such a conflict were to turn ***astro-nuclear...***

Casualties in the ***trillions.***

At best.

And you're asking us to...*what?* Choose a side *ourselves?* Lend your ruling powers *support* against a ***coup?***

I fear *interference* from Intergalactic Wakanda in Shi'ar affairs would be taken poorly by *both* sides.

But...it's an open secret that Xandra is the daughter of ***Charles Xavier.*** If she has *psychic gifts,* she is surely a mutant ***herself.***

Is there a *simple solution* we're not considering?

Can Krakoa bring her back?

ARBOR MAGNA

Back once again for the renegade master.

I'll admit, I'm a little surprised not to see the *Professor* here. I know he prefers to resurrect his own students when he can.

In fact, I have a *distinct memory* of him reading me the riot act for getting killed *last time*...

The Professor's... *resting*. He had a long day.

But I suspect *Ororo's* going to want to talk about what happened when she gets back from *space*...

Well, bear in mind that my last backup was *two days ago*--I can only *guess* what I did to tick Isca off.

I suspect we've *all* got questions.

Does he often come down here?

Santo? Sometimes he watches the process.

I don't know why. The Santo I knew died in *Otherworld*--and any mutant who dies there *can't be resurrected*.

That guy's some... *amalgam of all possible Santos*. And *he* was as shocked about it as anyone.

So if *anyone's* earned the right to come watch the show, it's poor *Rockslide*.

It's not like anyone can really *object*...

I wish to register an *immediate objection* to the resurrection of Xandra Neramani.

The Galactic Rim says no.

If reversing one death will stop a *galactic* war...

Listen to yourself. "Reversing *one* death."

Why ***this*** death? Why does an empress get a return ticket from the undiscovered country and not her subjects?

Why can only Earth's mutants deny the reaper? Where is the fairness? Where is the justice?

And what happens the ***next*** time she dies?

Reviving Xandra will not fix the rot in the Shi'ar Empire--only *stay the inevitable.*

But what it will do is install an ***immortal dictator*** on the throne--to rule till the end of time. I do not ***consent*** to that.

I will not permit it.

I say-- ***let there be war.*** If this is the bed the Shi'ar have made, let them lie in it.

It is the ***lesser*** of two evils.

And now we must decide.

Krakoans can *serve* on the Great Ring or they *cannot*. That is the question before us--

No.

Respectfully, Ora...***no.***

Krakoa is only a *place.* The precedent should be ***universal.***

Should those who have *removed* themselves from death's reach rule those who have ***not?***

That is the question...

...and ***this*** is our answer.

It's called a ***Cerebro Drive.*** *Forge* built it--our Omega technopath. He *tinkers.*

A similar principle to our larger ***Cerebro cradles***--but more *limited.*

This version does not ***create*** backups--it only ***stores*** a *preset selection.*

...

Backups?

Mental records of Krakoans. The "I" that *lives* on--the *self* that draws the ***soul*** back to the new body.

If souls ***exist,*** of course.

Perhaps this is *all* we truly leave behind us. *A handful of memories...*

...held tight against the setting sun.

Santo?

I don't know who that is.

The children call me "*Wrongslide.*"

Ouch.
Kids can be *cruel*, I guess...
Is *that* the intent?
I don't see it that way.
I don't want the name of somebody *lost*. ***That*** would be cruel--to ***everyone.***
"Wrongslide" is a sound that means ***only me.***
What's the sound that means only *you?*
Well...my *mutant name* is ***Sunspot.***
But I prefer ***Roberto.***
Ro-ber-to.
Did you *know* Santo?
I did.
His... ***death***...it hit *everyone* very hard.
It was *so arbitrary.* ***Casual,*** even. One day he was *here,* the next...
He was *so full of life,* Wrongslide.
It doesn't seem fair.
It just doesn't seem fair.

...

Once upon a time, I used the entire ***Nova Force*** to help bring the dead of Xandar back to life.

Pretty *basic*--cloned bodies, mind recordings. You've probably got a *better* way on Krakoa.

But a lot of people thought *that* was unfair too.

Anyway. Then the *Annihilation War* happened, the whole planet died *all over again* and I was left staring at the ***corpses.***

So, you know. Fairness ***restored,*** I guess...

Does Krakoa have *immortality?* Will *Xandra* have immortality? ***No on both counts.***

Everybody dies.

That's just *life.*

I don't *regret* buying Xandar a few extra days of peace. I won't regret it for those *colony worlds* either.

If it was *me* on Krakoa?

It'd already be done.

I'm glad you think so, Nova.

Because it is done.

What?

How does Krakoa even know? If you brought a *listening device* to this meeting--

Think, Oracle.

That *psychic wave* you caught--a ***broadcast***, you called it? Did you think that was meant for ***you?***

If Xandra has enough power to throw her entire ***being*** across the stars--*think where she got that power **from.***

"Think who has the power to ***catch*** it.

"***Charles Xavier***-- perhaps the universe's *most powerful telepath.*

"A man who--when offered the *choice* and the *chance*--

There...

There is still *hope*... still...

"--*will forever choose **life over death.***"

Hope! Convene the Five! ***NOW!***

Sinister-- construct this DNA sequence at *once!*

At once!

I appreciate Oracle *calling* this meeting. It's good to know these things *early.*

But there was never a ***debate*** to be had over this, Orbis Stellaris.

Mutantkind does not need *your permission to live--or to* ***thrive.***

Understand *that*...and perhaps our *miracles* will surprise you ***less.***

Good day.

You have something *more* to say, Nova?

Just that there's a lot of instability in the air right now. The *Reckoning*... this latest thing with the ***Shi'ar***...

...my ***Nova-sense*** is starting to *tingle* again.

My therapist says I *fixate* on things--*and I do*--but I still think we're trending ***toward*** something. Maybe a ***big*** something.

And I think ***Arakko***--the ***Diplomatic Zone***--might be the *focal point.*

Mind if I come *visit* for a while?

As long as you like, Richard. *You'll fit right in.*

And for what it's worth? I think you're ***right.*** Trouble *is* coming--*from all directions.*

Having *your* perspective certainly won't *hurt* us...

I hurt people by being here.

They see me and see their *friend*. Then they *remember*.

And it *hurts* them-- I ***see*** it hurt them.

I'm a hole in the world. A *tombstone* for someone they wish was here.

That isn't fair.

It's not fair that I make people *sad* when I'm so ***happy***.

It's so beautiful to be *here*, Roberto. Just to ***be*** here.

And it only lasts so long.

Mm. Even with the ***Five***, it only lasts so long. That was the lesson Santo *taught* us.

Death can be *denied, postponed, gamed*--but it can't be *avoided*. ***Every-one dies.***

That's just *life*...

Yes.

It's *life*.

Ha! Is *that* what you offer us, Magneto? Your Krakoan version of *immortality*-- a life so small you can keep it ***safe in a box?***

Do you think we ***want*** that?

No, Isca.

And neither do I.

That was *my* backup--and ***Storm's.*** The *only* copies--*and no more will be recorded.*

We two no longer have the Krakoan ***insurance.***

If we are to ***defend*** Arakko, we must be ***of*** Arakko. We understand the *logic.*

We understand the cost.

There are *other* ways back, of course. Other *doors.* My *daughter* built one.

But to come *that* way... you have to ***want*** to return.

As *Ororo* said-- *"To everything a season."*

I find myself in *autumn...*

...and I fear winter.

I've *seen* what comes in with the cold of *centuries.* What can *hide,* through *life after life...*even from *yourself...*

What would *I* become, with endless time? *I fear it, Isca. I fear it.*

I do not fear a life that ends.

You know...

...I think I want to die in *Otherworld.*

Not right *now...?*

No! Not for a *long, long time.*

But when the stone that's me is slowing on the water, then I'll go through the gate.

And when it *is* my time... I'll lie down in the flowers and give myself back to the *everything.*

And the Five will bring back someone ***new.***

And they'll be *alive.* They'll see what I see.

They'll see the ***beauty.***

I'll have shared it.

...

Can I ask you something, Wrongslide?

Have you been to *Arakko* yet?

The House of Uranos

17

PLANET ARAKKO. THE GREAT RING.

Mutants of Arakko--my name is *Abigail Brand.*

I know we've had our *differences*--but these are *special circumstances,* so I won't waste your time. I understand we don't have much *left.*

T-MINUS 01:00.

Krakoa's had a *precognitive warning* that Earth's ***Eternals*** are going to initiate a conflict with ***all mutantkind***--maybe as soon as today.

I'd class an immediate-future reading from our source at *98% accuracy or higher*--but I understand if Arakko's *own* top precog wants to verify.

T-MINUS 00:49.

Idyll?

Anybody *home...?*

T-MINUS 00:46.

As an *Omega Seer,* Idyll can see the ***true future***--what she cannot do is *alter* it. Even *before* Tarn stole her tongue, she gave no clues.

All we can do is *interpret* the notes of her silence. I would say in *translation...*

An empty heart beats hardest. An empty hand deals the impossible blow. And the stalemate ends with victory's loss.

T-MINUS 00:30.

It's *Ororo* who usually ends stalemates around here.

Where is she *today?*

T-MINUS 00:26.

She's giving the *Quiet Council* the Arakkii perspective, Isca. ***Nightcrawler,*** meanwhile, joins us with the *Krakoan* view.

Greetings, *meine Mitmutanden.*

T-MINUS 00:21.

So Princess Ororo reigns *elsewhere* today--all to the good. This is not the Table Day's *business.*

This is the Dawn's time. ***A war Council...***

T-MINUS 00:14.

Then let's talk *strategy.* The Eternals won't want to risk Arakko coming to the *rescue,* so we can expect them *here* as soon as they attack Krakoa.

They'll exercise *restraint* on Earth--maybe even keep it to the *psychic plane.* But here on the red planet, we can expect ***overwhelming force.***

T-MINUS 00:04.

And the only way to counter *that* is to be prepared ***beforehand.***

Okay. This is--

T-MINUS 00:03.

T-MINUS 00:02.

T-MINUS 00:01.

What in the--?

T-MINUS 00:00.

Incoming!

Mein gott. Get out. Get to safety--

That's not our way, Kurt.

Isca--be ready! With your power, you'll need to act first against...

SKLUTCH

...the enemy...

Yes.

That's just what I am doing.

Idyll...

Isca's mutant weapon is *not to lose!*

If she has *switched sides*, that means--

--that *someone* must take her *off the board.*

Kurt, don't--

BAM!

Here it comes! Brace for--

KROOM

Mutants of Mars. I am *Uranos.*

You have *deviated. Excessively.*

And I have *one hour* to **correct** *you.*

T-PLUS 00:29 AND COUNTING.

[00_mutants_of_X]
[00_the_world__X]

X-MEN RED

THE ETERNALS

The Eternals were created by the alien space gods known as the Celestials to protect the Earth. One of the Eternals' chief directives is to correct excess deviation. Druig, the current Prime Eternal, recently determined that Earth's mutants, with their ability to resurrect themselves, represent excess deviation.

Therefore, mutant existence cannot be allowed to continue.

[NIGHTCRAWLER]

[MAGNETO]

[IDYLL]

[SOBUNAR OF THE DEPTHS]

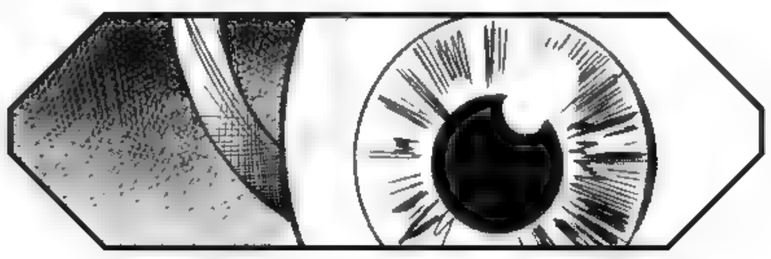
[LACTUCA]

Events in this issue are also referenced in A.X.E.:Judgment Day #1 *and* Legion of X #6.

[ABIGAIL BRAND]

[XILO]

[CABLE]


[ORA SERRATA]

[ISCA THE UNBEATEN]

[LODUS LOGOS]

[00_mutants_of_X]
[00_the_world__X]

[00_00….0]
[00_00…05]

THE ARMORIES OF URANOS

FORCES COMMITTED: 00.003%
FORCES REMAINING: 99.997%
DEVIANTS CORRECTED: 11,553
TIME REMAINING: 59m30s

ARE THE CELESTIALS PROTECTED? YES.
IS THE MACHINE PROTECTED? YES.
IS THE DEVIATION BEING CORRECTED? YES.
VERY GOOD. CONTINUE.

T-PLUS 00:30.
THE *ARMORIES OF URANOS* WERE ACTIVATED THE SECOND HE LEFT THE EXCLUSION. *NOW THEY OPEN LIKE FLOWERS.*

IN THE SKY ABOVE *PORT PROMETHEUS*, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

A NIGHTMARE MACHINE BLOTS THE SUN AND DISGORGES HORROR.

T-PLUS 00:45.
IN THE ART COMMUNITY OF THE *MORROWLANDS*, THE AIR SHIMMERS. *BIO-METALLIC SLIME* EMERGES TO INFECT AND CONSUME.

T-PLUS 01:00.
NIGHTCRAWLER AND ISCA MATERIALIZE OVER THE OCEAN WEST OF ARAKKO PRIME, WHERE ISCA DISLOCATES NIGHTCRAWLER'S ARM.

IN THE DISTANCE, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

T-PLUS 01:15.
IN THE VALLEY OF THE FALLEN, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

A THING OF LIGHT AND MONSTROUS ANGLES STEPS FORTH TO BURN THE EYES FROM THE PILGRIMS.

T-PLUS 01:30.
AT THE PEAK OF OLYMPUS MONS, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

T-PLUS 01:45.
ABOVE THE ARGYRE PLANITIA, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

T-PLUS 02:00.
AT THE EDGE OF SPACE, THE AIR SHIMMERS.

THE AIR SHIMMERS.
THE AIR SHIMMERS.
THE AIR SHIMMERS.

T-PLUS 06:00.
ORA SERRATA IS DOUBLING DOWN.

Cease to be! You will cease to be!

The eye of the law is upon you, and you will--

No.

There is *no law* but the principles coded into me, and no *vision* of that law but my own.

All non-Eternal life must end.

That is the law as I see it.

NOW you see it too.

EEEEIIGH!

SPLAT-CH

...you look *interesting.*

T-PLUS 06:21.
DAVID HALLER IS HERE.

HE IS THE SON OF *CHARLES XAVIER*--*TRUE MUTANT ROYALTY.* HE MAY BE THE MOST POWERFUL BEING TO *EXIST.*

Outside.

Hm.

Yes. Of course.

HE *MAY* BE.

Wouldn't want to break the *furniture.*

T-PLUS 06:28.
THERE IS A MOMENTARY LULL IN HOSTILITIES.

I've lost contact with *Station Two.* I've got to assume the Keep is *down*--maybe *destroyed.*

But they confirmed *multiple assaults,* all across Mars--

No need for your machine-eyes. *Lactuca sees*--*sees all.*

Enemy has *arsenals.* Machines of death, many-many. All across-world--and will fight without him...

A *challenge to all.* And the *seats of day* have responsibilities to the world, the sea and the sky...

What's happening up there...?

The worst, I fear.

Sobunar, Lactuca--defend the broken land. We'll keep him busy here--

--if we can.

You bore a brave boy, Charles.

T-PLUS 06:56.
DAVID HALLER IS GONE.

So much for that.

Where were we?

HOSTILITIES RESUME.

Lodus Logos!

I hear you, Magneto. And I believe I know your intent...

Yes.

Give me metal.

T-PLUS 07:04.
MUTANT CIRCUITS ARE RARE ON ARAKKO.

OMEGA MUTANT CIRCUITS, EVEN MORE SO.

T-PLUS 08:49.
IN THE SETTLEMENT AT ARGYRE PLANITIA, THE *BROTHERHOOD OF ARAKKO* JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST A SELF-REPLICATING MACHINE ARMY.

TOGETHER, THEY HOLD THE LINE.

T-PLUS 10:15.
ABOVE PORT PROMETHEUS, *THE MAN CALLED NOVA* FIGHTS TO PROTECT CIVILIANS FROM A DOZEN WORLDS AS THEY EVACUATE.

IT'S ALL UP TO ME, HE THINKS. HE THINKS THAT TOO OFTEN.

ALONE, HE HOLDS THE LINE.

T-PLUS 12:29.
AFTER HER VICTORY OVER NIGHTCRAWLER, *ISCA THE UNBEATEN* FELL INTO SOBUNAN'S OCEAN.

NOW HE *BESIEGES* HER THERE. HIS CREATURES ARE MANY, AND THEY FIGHT TO THE LAST.

THEY *TRY* TO HOLD THE LINE...

...BUT AGAINST SOME, THE LINE SIMPLY CANNOT BE HELD.

T-PLUS 13:01.

Hm. Between the *magnetism* and the *telekinesis*...you're actually *fighting* me.

Impressive.

Ah. Then it's *personal* in some way.

You...are everything...

*...I have **ever** fought against!*

My condolences.

To lose that fight...

Hnnhh--!

...must be heartrending.

T-PLUS 13:23.

MAGNETO FALLS.

Erik--

We'll mourn him tomorrow! If there *is* a tomorrow!

Belle-- bodyslide by zero! Weapon cache Omega-one!

THE *OMEGA-ONE PULSE RIFLE* IS THE MOST POWERFUL GUN IN CABLE'S ARSENAL.

IT FIRES BULLETS OF ULTRA-DENSE *SOLID LIGHT* ALONG A TUNNEL OF HARD RADIATION THAT CAN MELT *OSMIUM.*

IN THE YEAR *3877*, IT WILL BE CLASSED AS A *WEAPON OF ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION* AND *BANNED* FROM USE IN WARFARE.

BRRAVOOMM

IT *WEAKENS* URANOS.

...

Is that all?

THAT IS ALL.

T-PLUS 13:40.

T-PLUS 17:11.
AFTER THREE AND A HALF MINUTES OF CONSTANT FIRE, THE OMEGA-ONE OVERHEATS AND JAMS.

URANOS' WEAPON DOES NOT.

T-PLUS 17:20.
A BREACH WAS OPENED TO A DIMENSION OF *PURE DESTRUCTIVE FORCE*. LACTUCA SEALS IT AGAIN.

IT COMES TOO LATE FOR ALL HANDS ON THE KEEP.

T-PLUS 17:25.
IN THE *MORROWLANDS*, THE ARTISTS BATTLE THE METALLIC MASS, CAREFUL NOT TO LET IT TOUCH THEM.

T-PLUS 17:30.
XILO UNLEASHES THE INSECTS AND INVERTEBRATES THAT FORM HIM. THEY CAN SCOUR A HUMAN BODY TO THE BONE IN SECONDS.

THEY *DISGUST* URANOS.

T-PLUS 18:00.
IN *PORT PROMETHEUS*, EVACUATION HAS BEEN PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL— BUT *ALL KRAKOAN GATES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.*

SEVEN KYMELLIAN PRIESTS DIE BY FIRE BEFORE NOVA CAN SAVE THEM.

T-PLUS 18:30.
IN THE MARKETS BELOW, THE ARAKKII REGULARS FIGHT ALONGSIDE THE ALIEN VENDORS TO SAVE WHAT THEY CAN.

T PLUS 19:00.
URANOS METHODICALLY REDUCES THE COLLECTIVE THAT IS XILO TO 13.5% OF ITS TOTAL MASS.

MILLENNIA OF EYE-WITNESSED HISTORY-- LOST FOREVER.

T-PLUS 19:15.
ABIGAIL BRAND TRIES TO AVOID THE RESURRECTION PROTOCOLS.

SHE FAILS.

T-PLUS 19:30.
ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE PLANET, THE *FISHER KING* FEELS THE WIND CHANGE. *IT IS TIME.*

NIGHT HAS FALLEN.

T-PLUS 19:45.
ON *ARGYRE PLANITIA*, THE ARAKKII ARE FORCED INTO A *STRATEGIC RETREAT.*

YIELDING THE *FIELD* IS NOT YIELDING THE *FIGHT*, THEY REMIND THEMSELVES. *YET THE TASTE IS BITTER.*

T-PLUS 20:00.
IN THE GREAT RING, THERE IS SILENCE.

URANOS STILL HAS FORTY MINUTES LEFT.

HE USES THE TIME WELL.

T-PLUS 60:00.

THE HOUR IS OVER.

SO IS 98% OF ALL LIFE IN A FIFTY-MILE RADIUS.

URANOS LEAVES SATISFIED. HE IS SUPREMELY CONFIDENT IN HIS ABILITY TO BRING DEATH.

IN ALL THE AGES, HE HAS NEVER FELT THE NEED TO *CHECK HIS WORK.*

IN THIS, HE IS FOOLISH.

HE HAS SPENT THE LAST HOUR ON PLANET ARAKKO.

Loduszz!

AND ON ARAKKO, *YOU MAKE SURE.*

Loduszz, wake up!

→kaff!←

Forgive me. You were unconczziouszz--I hid you. I had no szztrength for anything elszze.

Pleazze believe I meant no inszzult...

He challenged **all of us.** We cannot yield **nor die too quickly.**

This way I fight again and taste **revenge** for the bones laid here.

No, I take no insult for **wise tactics.** How long was I out?

Don't know. Memory szztoreszz... **inszzinerated.**

Otherszz... may be alive...

Ora was maimed only. Gouged in the eye, but **body untouched...**

She has survived much **worse.** But her weapon will require **healing.**

And **Uranos'** weapons still roam unchecked. We must **strategize...**

No.

With *respect*, Lodus... such strategies are not a matter for the *Table Dusk.*

This is *war.* ***A war we are losing.***

And so the seat of loss takes command.

YOU ALWAYS MAKE SURE.

THE HOUR OF MAGNETO BEGINS.

X-Men Red #3 Variant

by Carlos Gómez
& Jesus Aburtov

The Hour of Magneto

18

[jet...[NA]__00]
[lab...[SA]__02]

NASA

TRANSCRIPT OF FIELD RECORDING: DR. C. MARSHALL

<recording begins 12:11:53 UTC>

[MARSHALL] Green light. That means it's working, see?

[MARSHALL] My name is Dr. Craig Marshall. I'm a soil scientist currently working for NASA. I've spent the last month living on Mars, or Planet Arakko as the locals call it, studying the results of the Krakoan terraforming process...and...

<pause>

[MARSHALL] ...and I'm broadcasting in the hope someone out there can record my last words.

[MARSHALL] It's funny. Scientists like me...non-mutants...we were given all these warnings. Commander Brand told us that the Arakkii were dangerous, unpredictable -- leaving the Diplomatic Zone was taking our lives in our hands -- but when I set up here, they were fine with it. Nothing but hospitable. Especially when I started helping with the harvest --

[CHILD'S VOICE] Insult! Insult, Craig of NASA!

[MARSHALL] Whoops. "Helping" implies the Arakkii needed help. I meant to say, I contributed to the shared work of the harvest -- how's that, Loolo?

[CHILD'S VOICE] You are forgiven, Craig of NASA!

[MARSHALL] Loolo knows I'm still learning. She's a nice kid. Not many kids on Arakko...not many survived the prisons... I'm getting off track.

[MARSHALL] The point is...look, I'm sure there are Arakkii who are macho creeps. There are humans on Earth who are macho creeps. But this was a -- a peaceful commune. The Law of Arakko is "destroy your enemies." But if someone's not an enemy, they're a friend. If you don't come here to fight them, they don't want to fight you.

[MARSHALL] Something came to fight them.

[MARSHALL] The commune leader -- Azzia of the Eight Blades -- she told me to stay here. Protect those who weren't of age to fight yet. And then -- I'm going to turn the camera and show you, I hope you can see this --

—

--then they went to fight *that.*

And they didn't come back.

So... yeah.

When it gets here, I'm going to try to *distract* it so Loolo and her brother can get *away*--

Insult, Craig of NASA!

So you can make a *strategic retreat*, I mean. Just for *now*, Loolo. I know you wouldn't ever yield.

But you don't have your *powers* yet. To fight, you need to ***survive***--for a *long, long time.*

Can you do that for me?

Can you live *through* this, honey?

Like in the prisons. I can do that.

I've done that.

But I don't want to *leave* you, Craig of NASA.

You're not ***of Arakko.*** You're just a human man from *Earth*--you shouldn't have to fight for us *alone*...

Trust me, I know. I just came to look at some *dirt*.

But...well, you folks treated me like I belonged from *day one*, so... yeah.

I guess I'm of Arakko ***today.***

The truth is spoken.

We see you, Craig Marshall. *You have a place in the broken land--**today and forever.***

But this is a *challenge-to-all...*

...and that means *nobody fights alone.*

I am *Ororo of the Storm. Storm of the Brotherhood.*

I sit on the *Great Ring of Arakko* and am called *Regent*--though more and more, even the *suggestion* of a throne...*chafes.*

At my side is the rest of the ***Table Day***--*Lactuca of the Stars* and *Sobunar of the Depths.*

The Eternals' attack on Arakko is a challenge to ***all,*** and ***nobody*** fights alone...

...but that doesn't mean I don't ***want*** to.

My brother. My sister.

May I lead this dance?

The creature attacks with *light*--a lattice of ***directed lasers*** amplified from a *single source.*

The first shot goes wide--after that, it has my *range...*

...for what little good that will do it.

Sobunar discreetly releases part of the endless ocean that is his blood. From the added moisture, I sculpt a *monsoon.*

A million raindrops fall from a clear sky...

...and *refract* the beast's light, blunting its weapons.

As it *halts*--recalibrating, compensating--I focus on the little machine at its heart. One of the death toys of ***Uranos,*** loosed by him upon our world.

Lactuca could teleport it into the sun--*but I am in the mood to express myself.*

I write my anger in the lightning.

SHZZKK

For all my *power,* I cannot be in *two places at once.* And so, once *again,* a people who I make bold claims to represent ***suffered***--*while I was elsewhere.*

But now your machines have my *full attention,* Uranos the Eternal. *And so do you.*

Will you survive the experience?

Another Eternal sword broken. But *too late* for the valiant ones who made this place their *grave...*

I know. I failed Arakko, Sobunar. *Once again, I wasn't here...*

The words of the ***old prison legend*** echo to me. *"If you weren't here, you were somewhere."* Fighting the *same* foe.

And we've foes *enough* to fight without turning on *our own selves and choices...*

Sobunar is right. Guilt is a luxury--as is ***time.***

We need to keep moving. Uranos' *machines* didn't leave our planet when *he* did--*the challenge to all goes on.*

You're the ***Knower,*** Lactuca--I'm relying on *your knowledge* of where we can do the most *good.*

Then ***share it,*** wind-walker.

Her bottomless eyes meet *mine.* For a moment, I am a *speck of dust* in an *endless ocean...*

and then

there is no

"me"

at all...

I am Richard Rider. I am destroying the drone factory above Port Prometheus, saving countless lives.

It took too long. I wasn't good enough.

*It's all up to me, it's all up to me, **it's all up to me...***

*I am a man **without a name.*** It was *psychically amputated* in the prisons to guard against the *Vile Omnipaths.*

I had no weapon, so I fought them with *nothing.* I was the *Omega* of having nothing. There was *no limit* to the nothing I had.

Another joins me. We are now two. ***Time to fetch the third.***

*I am Isca **the Unbeaten.*** I am killing fish.

Uranos' machines will *win* this war, even if I fight for Arakko. *So I fight for Uranos.* I have no choice in this matter.

I can never lose.

I am Wrongslide. I am fighting alongside the Brotherhood and the local population.

The machines *were* winning, but they have a strategic flaw. They prioritize *murder* over *all other action.*

Someone *built* these. For the first time in my life, ***I feel anger.***

I am Roberto Da Costa. I am a gorgeous pile of secrets. I love it when I get to reveal them.

The air near me shifts. There's a smell sweeter than brimstone. I finish what I'm doing and step away.

Time to reveal another secret.

I am Khora of the Burning Heart. Suddenly, I smell *jasmine*. I know what that means.

Night has fallen. My ***father*** prepared me for this--and for what I must become if *he* falls too.

For the first time in years, ***I think of my sister...***

I am Wiz-Kid. I'm on S.W.O.R.D. Station Two with *Cable,* trying to get it back online. As we head for what's left of the *Green Room,* he speaks in my mind.

I owe him a marker from when I *electrocuted his brain* a while back--he's calling it in. It's time, he says.

Time to talk about Brand.

I am the shape of Abigail Brand.

I am emerging from an egg. I am not technically alive. *Charles Xavier* is holding my mind in his, waiting to plug it back in.

I have never been this vulnerable.

I am Lodus Logos.

Metal, my voice.

Vengeance, my desire.

And *I*...

...*I am Magneto.*

So, Uranos set *you* loose to slay ***Arakko Prime,*** did he?

A thing *copied* from nature--with *plastic flesh, silicon blood*--to murder a *living island.*

Almost *poetic.*

Allow me to offer a *gift,* then--

--from ***our*** great poet.

Thank you for the ***metal,*** Lodus Logos. We make a *fine team...*

"Team." A word little used on Arakko. A word we could learn...?

Apocalypszze made uszze of mutantszz in conczzert... but the practiczze fell from favor... becauszze...

...becauszze...

...I do not know. Szzo much hiszztory iszz loszzt--szzo much of what I am. I muszzt learn a new name for this new szzelf.

Time for that tomorrow. Today, we fight so there may be one...

...even though we ourselves may not see it. How fares Magneto?

I am--nnh!--without a heart, Lodus.

As you say--I won't see tomorrow.

Seeing even another second requires constant command of my mastery of magnetism...

...mastery of even the iron in my own blood.

My mutant gift is all that's keeping it pumping--not a feat I could have managed as a younger man.

It requires flawless, absolute concentration--and more iron supplements than any doctor not named "Nemesis" would prescribe.

And even then, it's going to--nnh!--take more than I've got to--

Magneto?

What *happened* here...?

Roberto and *Fisher*. And a *new* face.

To what do we owe the pleasure?

You are *all that remains* of the ***Great Ring?***

We've been lucky. ***Idyll*** is dead--***at Isca's hands***--but the ***Table Day*** is engaged against the wider foe.

And ***Ora Serrata*** is *wounded but stable*--once she could move, she went to join her ***Inward Watch.***

Now answer *my* question. *Why are you here?*

When *Dawn*, *Dusk* and *Day* are split asunder...who's *left*, Headmaster?

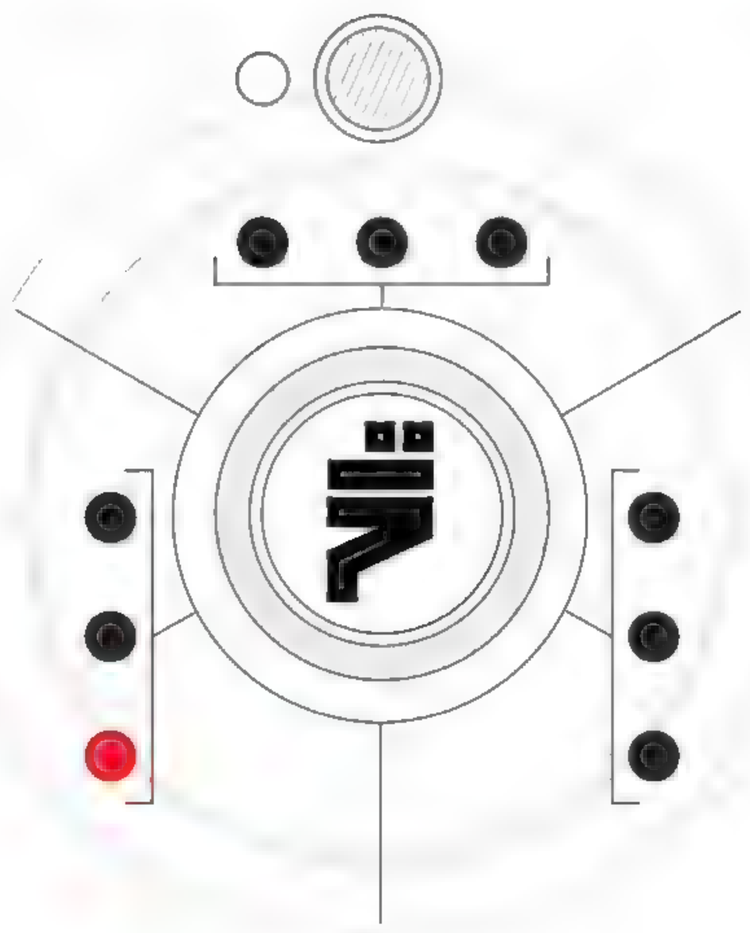
The Night Seats.

[OO.GREAT....O]
[OO.RING.....O]

THE GREAT RING OF ARAKKO

_HISTORY OF THE NIGHT SEATS.

IN THE BEGINNING, Great Okkara was ruled by the Seats of Dawn, Day and Dusk -- and to check them if need be, the Seats of Night, the Shadow Table. Self-recruiting, self-replacing, separate from the Great Ring and unbound by its customs. ***No Omega has ever served on the Night Seats. None ever will.***



IN THE SIEGE YEARS, the Night Seats served as spies and secret warriors, bringing information to the Great Ring of the growing demon hordes. But Genesis grew disdainful of war waged in shadows by those she saw as weak. ***From then on, the Night Seats were advisors only, their true strength forgotten.***

IN THE PROUD YEARS, Idyll the Ancestor, he who saw all futures, made prediction of doom and disaster. Though he was ridiculed, the Night Seats backed him and sought to stay Genesis' hand from action -- and this was more than she could bear. ***The Night Seats were dissolved, and Ora Serrata blinked them from existence. Then there was only the Great Ring.***

THEN ARAKKO FELL.

IN THE PRISON YEARS, there was one born of smoke and swiftly caged. There was one born with eyes of fire that saw truths terrible and wonderful. ***There was one with no weapon at all.*** And that one saw what the Great Ring had become -- ***and saw the need for a Shadow Table once more.***

IN THE YEARS OF ANNIHILATION, the Night Seats fought to keep Arakko alive under the rule of the Vile, and made hideous sacrifices for their fight. The Weaponless One had a Weaponless Child, and another who burned with her mother's heart -- but in the end, the fight was lost and love died in flame. ***The King at Midnight's tale is sorrow and despair. If you were there, you know.***

IN THE TRIAL OF SWORDS, the Night Seats rattled their chains and found hope in their dungeons, even after the loss of one of their own. ***Hope in a name -- Krakoa.***

THEN ARAKKO ROSE AGAIN.

IN THE NEW LANDS, a young man of many worlds and many lands approached the surviving two. That he knew of them at all spoke of his ability, that he found them spoke of his skill. He was not of Arakko -- ***but the Night Seats are unbound by custom. And now they are three once more.***

SYZYA OF THE SMOKE ------- THE SEAT OF NOWHERE
[HE HAS NO NAME] ------- THE SEAT OF NOTHING
ROBERTO DA COSTA ------- THE SEAT OF NOBODY

But if I'd *known* this nightmare would happen--

Much as it might bruise your *ego*, lad, not everything is about *you*.

You didn't start this war. And if you think *your words* pushed me into *fighting* it...

Will you trick the *sun* into rising next? Take credit for *that?*

You may have chosen a seat at the *table*, but the *cards* were dealt *long ago*. If all you can do is *play* this game to the best of your *considerable ability*--

--then I expect nothing less.

Yes, sir.

But as to your *fellow players*... I'm *disappointed*, Fisher King.

Here I was thinking our meeting was a *happy coincidence*...

Roberto vouched for you. But I had to be ***sure***, Max.

Lots of *empty barrels* making *big noises* in the Broken Land.

In the prisons, they turned to the *Vile*-- took bribes of *power* for pieces of their soul.

Perhaps I could have stopped it...but I had my *own* pride...

I had to be sure. But you ***opened your door,*** Max. Right away, you opened your door.

Will you close it now?

Of course not.

Time is too short.

I grow *weaker.* But before--*rrh*--before I can ***rest,*** I have to know Arakko will *survive* me.

I didn't catch *your* name--

Syzya of the Smoke. My weapon is to be any place I *know* of, in a puff of my smoke, and to bring *others.*

But the *Vile* knew ways to block and trap me, make the prisons *my* prison too. Now free, I keep *secret,* to not be caged again...

Someone should--*nnh!*--introduce you to ***Nightcrawler.***

In his absence, we'll need your help to assemble our *forces...*

A big ask to ask for. Arakko's busy fighting a *hundred battles* against a *hundred foes* in a *hundred places.*

And mostly trained for *siege warfare*--or *single combat.* Too set in our ***old ways...***

Then let the old wayszz change.

We work the land and soil ***communally,*** *sharing* ***homes and tools.***

Let us reap our vengeance in that spirit. ***A harvest of blood...***

Or whatever these machines have *instead* of...

RRRRRT

...no.

AUUURRRRHH!

I am Magneto.

I have held myself together--*done the work of an absent heart*--for as long as I can.

I saved the living island Arakko, and I thought the battle was ***done.*** That I could perhaps *rest* or pass the burden to a *friend.*

Have I not learned by now? *I can never rest.*

The battle will never end.

They *heal.*

The machines of Uranos ***heal!***

I am Khora of the Burning Heart. I watch the same machine I just dispatched stagger to its feet.

I grip my blade and *remember--the dozens I slew before that...*

I am Uthios Stone-shedder. I make art in the Morrowlands.

We were attacked by a *metallic slime,* and our story-smiths reached into it and *rewrote* it at the cost of their minds. It *died.*

We were so sure it died...

I am Richard Rider. One of the remaining drones is *evolving*--there's no other word for it. Growing into... *Oh, no.*

Not again.

Focus. It's all up to me.

It's all up to...

...me?

Lactuca's strange gift *fades.*

Come on, curse you.

I'm not dead yet...

I know, as she does, *where we need to be.*

And once more, *I know who I am...*

I am Storm.

SHRA-ZAKK

AAAAHHH!

A little-known fact-- Magneto's *mutant gift attunes to my own.*

Once, I struck him with *lightning--*

--and he used that to *empower himself* at the expense of my *life force.* He *took* it from me then...

...now I offer it freely.

I feel his focus *restored.* An invisible *heartbeat*-- near-impossible to maintain-- becomes *effortless.*

My own heart... *skips.*

But he *must* take what I give him. ***We both know it.***

The Arakkii watch in shock. Yes, tactics are not help. Yes, *nobody fights alone.* But ***this?***

This is a societal rule not *bent,* but ***shattered***-- *explosively, gloriously.*

Without the *need* for words, ***I give of myself***-- and he accepts *without hesitation,* though any *error* means ***my life for his.***

In the broken land, such *intimacy* is reserved for the *closest of lovers...*

Ready?

Oh yes.

...but we did not come to make love.

KRAKOOM

We came to make war.

Molten iron from the planet's core melts the plastic monstrosity--

--even as my own command of climate and temperature keeps Arakko Prime from being harmed.

The release of power...is intense.

Remember this moment. All rules broken for the broken land...

And the beginning of a new hiszztory, perhapszz.

If we can live to szzee it...

And...breathe. Remember to keep that "heart" beating, old man.

Do we have time for a quick trip to the Healing Gardens...?

Mm. Is that aftercare, Ororo?

I'm sure the correct mutant circuit to regrow a heart could be sourced...

...but we all know there isn't time.

Isca's still not with us--so we're still losing. Every moment that passes, we lose more.

I was wrong though. This is a siege--planet-size.

Right. If Arakko holds the line long enough, we can find the off switch for the murder army.

And if we don't know where that is--we know who has it.

It's decided, then.

We take the fight to Uranos himself...

...and destroy our enemy.

The Winning Side

19

IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH.

URANOS FALLS.

...

"You have new gods now."

Very funny. Don't try to *talk*--

I always knew who I was speaking to, Ororo. Those who would never be so gauche as to say it *themselves*--***even as they pull our wings off for sport.***

I needed them to *know*... that godhood was no longer an ***exclusive club...***

And look at me now. A *full member*--dying for the world that hates and fears us.

Bitter irony on--*kaff*--on ***so many levels...***

I said "*don't talk*," not "*give a soliloquy.*"

I can still keep you ***alive***--if you just--

Even you can only hold back death for so long.

Some things are out of our hands.

Resurrection. Even with *no backup*, you can *return*--

With no backup, it's *my decision*. You wouldn't break your word either.

And we'll need Arakko *with* us...for what's *to come*...

You honestly think what we need right now is a *martyr?*

No.

That's why you have to promise me, Ororo.

Promise me you'll watch Charles.

What...?

Three *began* Krakoa. *Moira* betrayed us. *I...deserted my post.*

Now Charles is alone. *With his dream...*

Humans and mutants standing together.

There are *worse* dreams...

There are. I've come to *understand* that.

To understand that *nothing less will save us.*

We *must* stand together.

We must *fight* together--*all* of society's so-called undesirables, *human or mutant--*

--or our enemies will *destroy* us *simply for daring to exist.*

Because they never *stopped,* Ororo.

They have never stopped.

Charles... Charles dreams of persuading the world that we have value.

In the hope that the world will then make us *safe.*

My dream was simpler.

To *assure* our safety...*whether the world values us or not.*

Krakoa was a *compromise.* A *shared* dream...

But we were *old fools,* building on sand... and *now...*

"...there will come a *day.* If we live... I fear it will be ***soon.***

"Our enemies will ***strike...*** and Charles will feel forced by events to ***act.*** To *do* something-- because ***something must be done,*** however terrible--

"--and because, in the no-place of his heart, he cannot see a *choice.*

"And on that day...*he will martyr us all."*

He is a *good man,* Ororo. We must be *wary* of good men.

For what will they *not* do...***to show how good they are?***

Watch him.

...

I shall try.

Good. Then...then I can...

...

Anya?

Do you see her, Ororo? She...she's *smiling.*

Do you see?

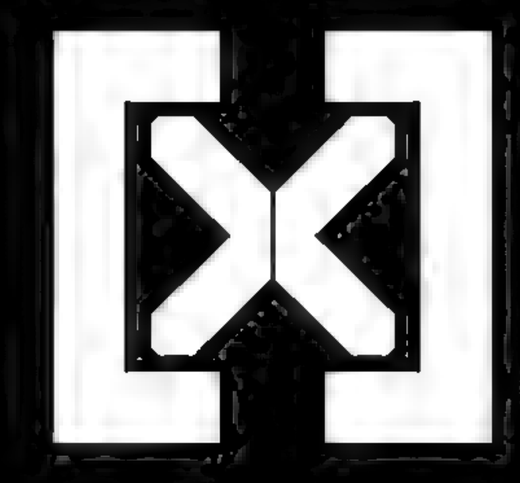
Yes.

Yes, I can see her.

She's proud of me.

I'll be right there, my dove.

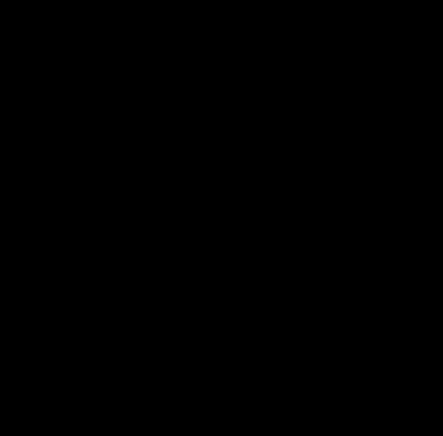
I'll...



You cannot wish us away. You cannot ignore us.

We are your children.

-- MAGNETO



ARAKKO PRIME.

WHAT URANOS LEFT BEHIND.

So much death. And for what?

A madman's dream. A faulty machine.

We will not forget you. We see you all and count you of us.

And on your bones, proud friends... we'll build anew what our foes destroyed.

Three tables and nine seats. Two tables whole, against all the odds...

But not the Dawn Table. That lays empty, with two honored dead...

...and one I name traitor. Arakko's bane. Idyll's murderer.

Isca the Unbeaten.

Isca the Rogue.

Isca of Amenth.

Have a *care*, Lodus Logos.

Your *next* little haiku may be your *last*--

*You threaten **me** with death?*
Foolish, Isca.
Art lives forever.

However, there is no true *precedent* for this situation.

To have one of the Great Ring ***kill another***--*outside the circle, **in a time of war...*** even ***Tarn*** never dared take that step.

It is *unheard of*--in my time, at least.

Xilo...?

I... cannot *szzay*. The memorieszz are *loszzt...*

So the Seat of Law knows ***no law*** and the Seat of History knows ***no history.***

And you presume to judge me...?

We are all being judged, Isca.

Earth and *everyone of Earth* is to be judged--*one by one* and *all together.*

"Tested by Celestial forces greater than any of us can *possibly comprehend..."*

...and though you've been away from the mother world a *long time*...that includes *you.*

Perhaps you more than any of us.

And more than any, I will *pass* that test. ***Because I cannot fail.***

Worry about ***yourself.***

Ororo Windrider. *Condolences on Magneto's loss.*

*To the **Fisher King** too, Lord of Midnight, I offer regret...*

*...and some **trepidation** that the Night Seats now stand in **daylight.***

A reasonable fear. *Traditionally,* we make ourselves known when ***night has fallen--*** when the times bode *ill.*

That's why Genesis had the *original* Seats of Night *dissolved,* isn't it? They made themselves known a little ***too*** much.

And ***you dissolved them,*** didn't you, Ora?

It was decided that the Night Seats were *no longer necessary--*

See, I'd think *that alone* made them *more necessary than ever.* But what do ***I*** know?

I'm not a ***genius military mind*** like ***Genesis*** was...

I'd *never* consider strategies like *sitting in one place for ten thousand years.*

Getting high on my own ***pomp and grandeur...***

What did you say...?

Here's a thought. Did the great warrior Genesis ***ever*** win anything that ***actually mattered,*** Isca?

If she had-- ***wouldn't you have come home?***

Bold words from a child I've *killed* once already.

What would you do if ***I*** *asked you to back them up?*

What if I asked *any* of you to back your words up? ***Any of you!***

What if ***I*** should judge you? *One by one or all together?*

What would you do?

"Most of you have faced me in battle at least *once*. Some of you for *training*--and *some for real*.

"And how did that *end* for you?

"You *lost*.

"All of you lost--"

--because *I never can!*

You only draw breath *now* because I was ***merciful!*** You hold court because I ***abstain*** from it!

If I decide, in the face of your *hubris*, that the *entire Great Ring* is mine--that this entire planet is mine to control--***what would you do?***

Knowing you would lose? Knowing you ***already*** *lost to me?*

WHAT WOULD ANY OF YOU--

KRA-KROOOMM

Knowing we would lose...

...we'd fight you anyway.

...

To the death...?

There are things in this life more important than simply living.

Isca who-speaks-of-us, who-speaks-for-us, who-speaks-over-us.

Isca who-does-not-know-us.

Arakkii are not afraid, Isca.

We are not afraid of a life that ends...

But it won't come to that.

There'll be no battle today between Isca and the Great Ring...

...because that's what the Night Seats are for.

You. I remember you.

A little *rat*, scurrying through the prisons. A *fly* we never managed to *swat*.

But better late than never...

Aye. I was thinking the same.

I challenge you to a contest of understanding, Isca.

And the winner...

...is the one who most truly understands *the meaning of loss.*

[00_Isca_the_]
[__Unbeaten__]

Pathetic little fisherman, Isca thought. Standing there with weight on his belly and gray hairs on his head after only sixty years, speaking to one who has lived ten thousand and more -- and never lost a fight in her life. And what had this fisherman ever lost? His freedom? His love? His family?

Ten thousand years and more...

Isca's thoughts turned, unbidden, to her childhood. Laughing, splashing in the surf off Okkara with her sister. Running games on the sand. Who could swim fastest, skim a stone farthest? Little Isca always lagged behind, but she laughed with the others. When she began to win, it was a novelty at first.

But she could never lose.

The games ended soon after. But life was good. Her sister married a blue-lipped boy who hung on every word of her philosophy. Children were born, and swords were forged in ceremony, for their old use was long done with.

Then the demons came, and one island became two -- the number of the fall. Of the self and the shadow self. And Isca won every battle -- carving her personal swath through the demon army.

She could never lose.

Her efforts brought Annihilation to the gate with whispered words for her sister, that appealed to Genesis' ideals -- her dark dreams of what Arakko could be. Temptations that were heeded.

She remembered feeling the shift inside her -- when there could be no winning -- and it had felt like nothing at all. It was not she that had changed but the world around her, the perspective flipping so completely that there was simply no choice to be made. No choice at all.

She could never lose.

So she left her home behind and walked into Amenth, to the demon lands, to join the First Summoners and fight for their cause. And she took one, bone-white and lean -- a genomic mage with a quick, cruel wit and the devil in his eyes -- to be her lover. Together, they were conquerors and prison lords, bending the proudest to their will, and the calls of "traitor" and "oathbreaker" were as easily borne as summer rain on her skin. Until the world shifted again. Until she turned again.

For she could never lose.

And -- after the great victory she joined so late -- her people despised her, and her family was lost to her, and all her love's wit and cruelty was spilled onto the dirt with his brains, while she watched. And that too was in some way because she could not lose -- for there was cruel wit to be found on Krakoa as well.

And then the world had shifted again, and shifted back, and she had never had a choice. So there was no freedom for her either, even now. How could there be?

How could she understand loss?

Isca remembered a laughing girl running along a beach. She fell to her knees.

One second had passed.

I understand.

I resign from the Great Ring.

I do not *belong* in the Seat of Victory. I do not belong in *any* seat at all...

...because I am not of *Arakko*. I can **never** be.

I can never *lose*.

Even now.

Isca...

Don't.

Don't talk to me.

And don't follow where I'm going. *Any of you.*

I may kill you all yet.

So now the Great Ring is *six*, where once were *nine*--for I'll not disband the Night Seats *twice*, even to *shore up our numbers*...

Aye. Nor would we of Night attempt again to sway the ***daylight.***

Seconded. *I do my best work in the shadows.*

And yet, to have *no Table of the Dawn*--in a time of ***war against a god***-- is unacceptable.

There is *no precedent* for this...and with our *history* sundered, we cannot look to the *past*...

Look to the future, then.

Not to what was but to what can be...

Ever the *optimist*, Lodus.

You'd rule us *all* with your dreams--

YES!

*New worlds **need** new dreams! New ways of life that are **more than** war!*

*Would we be like our **foes**? **Eternal** and eternally **caged**?*

*So **shackled** to the ways of **older** days that we **cannot** change?*

*We **stand** upon our dead!*

And they demand MORE from their Great Ring!

...

You're right.

More is demanded--and more must be given.

I yield the seat of All-Around-Us to Lodus Logos.

What...?

...

*And I **accept** the weight of the noon seat and the second vote.*

Madness! There can be *no transfer without challenge--*

It is a challenge of *fitness for the role*, and I *yield.*

The Regent's seat decides the ***future of this land,*** Ora. Who should chart that future, if not our ***poets*** and ***dreamers?***

Because it can't be me.

I am of both *Earth and Arakko--**my mother and my child.*** How can I abandon *either?*

Yet so long as I uphold my responsibility to *both--* ***my attention is divided.***

So you *too* are leaving the Great Ring...?

I never said that.

There'll be no shortage of applicants to the Table Dawn if there's a *tomorrow.*

But as Ora says--***someone has to sit here today.***

This seat belonged to my brother mutant. My implacable enemy. My trusted ally.

I held him in my arms as he died. I wonder if I knew him at all.

Tomorrow--*if we know victory*--perhaps I'll take *another* place in the dawn.

Today, there's only one that fits.

In Magneto's name...

...Ororo of the Storm claims the Seat of Loss.

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO.
THE KEEP.

Wiz-Kid to *Cable*. She just logged in.

Oh--and my *dead mom* just gave me a ***thumbs-up***. Something about looking for the *truth* even though I don't want to *know* it.

How's your end of the world going?

I'm keeping busy.

Bodyslide by one.

For all I know, I'm risking the *bad thumb* by taking time out on a *personal project*.

But part of fighting *today's* war is planning for the war ***tomorrow***...

And if *tomorrow never comes*, that's one less war to worry about?

You're getting *cynical* in your old age.

Frankly, I'm less concerned about the world ending and more about Brand noticing our *hack*...

That's the beauty of it. We're not hacking *anything*.

The Keep is a reality-warped *duplicate* of the Peak--not just a *copy*, but the ***same station*** in ***two places at once***.

Kind of like two *particles* in *quantum entanglement*. The information of the Peak ***wants*** to flow to the Keep.

Including ***Brand's files***...

RETRIEVING FILE::
VOND EYES ONLY::
ESSAGE

"She was *just resurrected,* and her last backup was ***six days ago.*** Whether that backup included all her *secrets,* I don't know--either way, she won't want to make any moves ***twice.***

"So she'll have left *notes* for herself--what she ***did*** in those six days, what she ***didn't.***"

And thanks to your *quantum entanglement,* we'll see those notes as she ***accesses*** them.

Here we go...

And then I guess we have to decide what to ***do*** about it.

Honestly? If she *did* kill Henry Gyrich? I say we take it to ***Nightcrawler*** first, rather than the *Council.*

Whatever Brand's done, she doesn't...

...deserve...

Holy crap.

Holy ***crap.*** Are you--are you *seeing* this? What she's been ***doing?***

Cable? I said, are you...

CLK-CLAK

...
So that's a "yes."

Mission to the Unknown

20

GOSNELL'S BAR ON ODLO-MAYAN. WHERE THE GALAXY'S MERCENARY ELITE DRINK AWAY THEIR BATTLES.

They told me this was where the galaxy's *mercenary elite* drank away their battles.

You are not what I pictured.

...

How so?

It was a *mistake* to leave Arakko. I left a planet at *peace*--and it plunged into ***war***. A war I could have found *purpose* in.

The only things I've found out here are *treaties* and *talking animals*...

Yeah, with the Guardians doing all the hero-type stuff for *free*, merc jobs are *thin on the ground* right now.

Me and the Prince of Power here mostly do ***repo work*** and have ***wacky adventures***...

Still, the universe is a *big place*--bigger than it *used* to be, even. Lot of room for things to go *sideways*, right?

Patience and time, that's *this* old rabbit's motto. If you can't find any ***trouble*** out there...

...it's probably busy finding ***you***.

Weaponless Zsen!

...

So I see...

Sister.

Khora. Did Father send you?

I know he's returned from his shadows--but I won't speak to him again. Not after what happened.

And he feels the same, Zsen.

But... I sent myself.

This is Cable the Askani'son. We worked together.

He has a job.

A job? Hey, if you need an extra set of paws--or some seriously toned muscles--Blackjack O'Hare (and Associate) can supply...

Don't call us, we'll call you, Blackjack.

But Khora says you have an ability that might be useful, Zsen...

In the *Morrowlands*, maybe--with the *artists and dreamers*. But art wasn't what I dreamed of in the *prisons*...

This would be a *military application* of your talent.

And it's my understanding that you have *other* weapons...?

Ooh. Detachable prosthetic blade.

That's some *nice tech*.

Ocular scan says that's about as sharp as *Logan's*--and almost as unbreakable. *Very* nice tech.

Thank you. *I paid dearly for it.*

So, what am I *using* it for?

CHAK

I hear little *Khora* performed *assassinations* for Abigail Brand--is that what you have planned for *me?*

Who's my *target?*

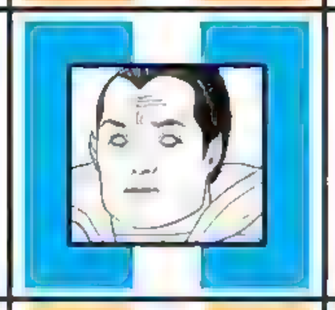
Abigail Brand, of course.

But we're taking the *long way 'round*...

[GALA....[represe]_00]
[CTIC....[ntative]_08]

EMERGENCY DIPLOMATIC MEETING :: CODE RED

LOCATION: LAKE HELLAS DIPLOMATIC ZONE.\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
IN DISPUTE: KREE/SKRULL ALLIANCE, SHI'AR EMPIRE.\\\\\\
FULL DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES INVOKED.\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
ESCALATION POTENTIAL: SEVERE. \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\
LISTED ATTENDEES ARE AS FOLLOWS: \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\

Empress Xandra of the Shi'ar		**SHI'AR EMPIRE**	Current Leader of the Shi'ar Empire.	[illegible]
Gladiator		**SHI'AR EMPIRE**	Superguardian Leader. Sworn to the Empress Xandra's service.	Present.
Deathbird		**SHI'AR EMPIRE**	Aide and bodyguard to Empress Xandra. Sister to the late Empress Lilandra.	Due to attend.
Kl'rt, the Super-Skrull		**KREE/SKRULL ALLIANCE**	Galactic Council representative for the Kree/Skrull Alliance.	Unable to attend for personal reasons.
Paibok, the Power Skrull		**KREE/SKRULL ALLIANCE**	Ambassador to the Sol System for the Kree/Skrull Alliance. Attending in place of Kl'rt.	Present.
Ororo of the Storm		**SOL SYSTEM**	Galactic Council representative for the Sol System.	Unable to attend. No reason given.
Frenzy		**SOL SYSTEM**	Chief Diplomat for S.W.O.R.D. and the Lake Hellas Diplomatic Zone. Attending in place of Ororo.	Present.
The Man Called Nova		**GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**	He stood when all else fell. He stands when all is lost. *The Broken Land sees him.* Richard Rider is *of Arakko.*	Present.

ARAKKO.
THE DIPLOMATIC ZONE.

I should say before we *start* that our Emperor considers this a *highly delicate matter.*

As in all things, he wishes to *avoid war...*

Is that why the Kree/Skrull Empire sent their ***second*** most important diplomatic envoy to meet with our Empress? To avoid an ***insult?***

Play *nice,* Gladiator.

It's a fair question. Normally, the ***Super-Skrull*** would be present for this meeting...

...but he swore an oath *not* to *commit murder in the Emperor's service.*

And he doesn't quite trust himself to keep it.

The old saying is ***true,*** then--*a Skrull's mask will always slip.*

And no ***Ororo*** either. Again, the *Voice of Sol* has no time to speak to *us...*

But you'll find me a *fair mediator* in whatever dispute this is.

Like the man *said,* Paibok--play nice.

Of course, Frenzy. *I always do...*

A prior conflict--emphasis on the "*conflict.*" Auditions for the empty seats of the ***Great Ring,*** I suspect.

S.W.O.R.D. STATION ONE COMMAND DECK. THE GREEN ROOM.

Is it my imagination, or are they *flirting?* I thought Frenzy only had eyes for **Scott Summers.**

Oh my god, does Paibok shape-shift into Scott Summers?

I don't pay you to *gossip,* Mentallo.

Well, ***excuuuuse me.*** Is the grand plan not going to *plan,* Boss?

Let's *hope* it is. But Xandra's running *late*--and I don't think ***Paibok's*** in a mood to wait for her.

But if ***this*** doesn't lure her to Arakko, I don't know what *will.*

And then there's ***Storm.***

It's fine if she doesn't *turn up*--as long as she's where I can *see* her. But she's not on Krakoa *or* Arakko--at least, nowhere we have eyes on.

"So where *is* she?"

I'd like to tell you a ***story,*** Gladiator.

Roughly three standard decades ago, there was a *lull* in the Kree/Skrull War. *Peace talks* were in progress.

At which time, the Kree received word of a *breach* of the ***Pan-Worlds Arms Treaty.***

The Skrulls--***my people***--were allegedly conducting *forbidden genetic weapons research* at a *secret facility...*

...codenamed ***Shapeless Ridge.***

"The Kree Command decided that a small force of *stealth warriors* could *destroy* the facility where a larger force might *fail.*

"The experimental Kree ***Super-Soldier, Captain Glory,*** led that force. He succeeded *admirably*-- ***massacring every soul there.***

"In fact, *they barely put up a fight...*

"...because Shapeless Ridge did not *make* weapons. It was a *treatment facility* for wounded Skrulls no longer able to shape-shift. *Civilians,* by any measure.

"The intelligence was wrong.

"The Kree refused to admit the error. So we swore *revenge*--and the war flared up *again,* more bitter than ever."

New information, however, has now come to light.

The Kree did not make their error *alone.* They were fed *false reports* designed specifically to goad them into a *war atrocity.*

Who would do such a thing, Gladiator?

I--I don't know what you're--

We would.

The *Shi'ar* spread those lies in order to *prolong the Kree/Skrull War--for our own strategic benefit.*

It is one of the *Ten Shames* that our Kin Crimson sought to bury.

The crimes of previous Shi'ar regimes...

Empress *Xandra...!*

...that we must now pay for.

In full measure.

There she is.

It's *showtime.*

ONE PARSEC FROM DOLO-MAYAN.

Okay. The pieces are in place--it's *showtime*, folks.

Welcome to the good ship...

...well, it's either "*Bebop II*" or "*Brett Anderson*" at this point, I haven't decided.

It's *whatever you want it to be*, Wiz-Kid. With *your* mutant ability, that's a ***literal fact.***

Anything from a *sleek fighter* to a *long-distance exploratory vessel*...

...though when it comes to *long distance*, I'll defer to our resident ***Everywhere Man.***

Ready to get us where we need to be, Manifold?

Mostly. There's a few details I'm still *fuzzy* on...

Might as well bring everyone up to *speed*, then.

Recently, ***Abigail Brand*** triggered the *resurrection protocols.*

But a resurrection via *Cerebro backup* only goes *so far.*

That means when she came out of the *egg*, the first thing she did was check her *files* to see what she was *missing*...

...but *we* were checking them too.

And we saw ***everything.***

Which isn't *everything*--just the most recent file. Still, it's pretty damning.

Abigail Brand is working with ORCHIS.

Or *playing* them, at least. To her, *all* of this--***Krakoa and Arakko***--is a *temporary situation* that can be leveraged to advance *more important goals.*

Wheels turning on a scale ***so large*** that we could *all* be crushed in their gears...

Yeah--see, that's not the part I'm fuzzy on. What I need is a *destination.*

I can take us *anywhere in the universe,* but I still need a ***start point*** and an ***end point...***

This might help. Brand's not *just* working with ORCHIS--she's partnered with a Rimworld diplomat named ***Orbis Stellaris.***

Please tell me that pun was *going* somewhere...

He's a *gene-tech entrepreneur* of unknown origin--rumor has it that he also runs a profitable sideline in *bioweapons,* including *militarized cloning.*

Quite a ***well-rounded individual...***

Brand didn't cultivate him just for his *diplomatic clout.*

She *partnered* with him to steal a sample of ***this...***

...my ***Techno-Organic virus.***

SNKT

Impressive.

It has its *uses*, or I'd have ditched it at my first resurrection. But *controlling* it takes work.

I'm guessing she sent a sample to ORCHIS to keep them *sweet*--

--but knowing Brand, she's got ***bigger*** plans.

Luckily, so do ***I***.

Hey--

Relax-- it won't infect you. My telekinesis keeps it on a leash.

See, my virus is based on the more common ***Technarch*** strain, but tweaked by ***Apocalypse***. It's *unique to me*...

...and whatever sample ***Orbis*** has is unique to me too.

There are only two places in the universe where that *particular* viral load is found. One is in *the palm of your hand.*

Can you find the other?

...Yeah.

I know where it is.

It's *far*--out beyond everything. ***The gulf between the galaxies.***

I can *get* us there, but getting us *back*...

You caught a *space station*. I have faith.

You just build the gate...

...and I'll take us ***through!***

...

Pretty nice view.

It's called the ***World Farm,*** Thunderbird.

Home of the ***Progenitors***--*ancient alien super-scientists.* The ones who attacked Arakko to steal my T-O virus.

I was assuming Stellaris was using Progenitor *clones,* though.

If he's got access to the *real* ones...

We *take 'em down,* Junior. Just the same.

We're here to find out how deep Brand's plans go. That means we don't quit until we *hit bottom.*

No matter what's in our way.

I *like* this one.

You would.

I know *I'm* ready to find out more.

Brand really had me *fooled...*

Me too-- before I had a few decades to *think* about it.

We need someone to stay on the ship though, Taki. And since you're the one who ***built*** it...

Manifold--can you get us ***closer?*** I don't want to have to hunt for a *needle* in an *artificial solar system...*

Pfft. You're lucky I still owe you for the ***brain thing.***

It's *tricky* with a start point *this* far out-- but sure.

Just brace yourselves...

...for a sudden drop!

Have a nice *trip,* gang--

See yrkkrzzt--

--krrzz--

We lost the Kid--

Pretty sure these *planet-sized habitrails* block *communication signals.*

Might be a problem for *me* too-- I'm not seeing any *windows* in here, and I need to see *outside* before I can open a portal ***beyond this room...***

We'll cross that Einstein-Rosen bridge when we come to it.

In the meantime, it looks like you got us into the *right place--*

--that's the *same* Techno-Organic virus the Progenitors took from me. Looks like they've been ***breeding*** it.

Which answers *some* questions--but not *all* of them.

Why would the Progenitors *ally* with Orbis Stellaris? Why would *he* pursue *their goals?*

And what does ***Abigail Brand*** get out of...

...ah.

This mob's some *scary business*...

The Arakkii are not *easily* intimidated by *mummies in glass coffins*...but something is ***hidden*** in these sleepers.

If I painted *their* truth, *none* could gaze on it and *remain sane.*

Don't get *distracted,* Junior. Unless Brand's in the ***alien-dracula*** business, it ain't *our* business.

We'll soon find out.

There's a *data file* connected to these caskets-- I think I can access it without tripping any *alarms*...

...there.

YOU HAVE GOOD IN YOU.

SOME SMALL MICROSCOPIC MEASURE THAT--GIVEN FERTILE SOIL--COULD GROW INTO SOMETHING MORE. IT'S A CANCER...

AND THAT IS UNACCEPTABLE FOR THE WORK WE HAVE SET IN FRONT OF YOU.

SO WE'VE SEPARATED THE TWO. INSIDE--HIDDEN UNDER A THIN LAYER OF THAT GOOD--

--IS THE BEAUTIFUL BROKEN CREATURE YOU ARE.

Who is? Who are they talking about?

It's a nano-camera recording. I can't control the angle...

WE'RE GOING TO RELEASE YOU BACK INTO YOUR UNIVERSE. THEY WILL SEE YOU AS CHANGED--REBORN, HEALTHY AND WHOLE. BUT THAT IS JUST A SHELL.

UNDERNEATH IT--BURIED ALIVE IN A SHALLOW GRAVE...

My god.

--IS THE REAL YOU.

Vulcan's mysterious return from the *Fault*. Right at the dawn of the Krakoan Age. It was *orchestrated*.

They *knew* we'd take him in. Scott wanted...we *all* wanted him to be *whole*...

The perfect sleeper agent.

Wait--this is *all* Abby? The *space lab between galaxies* is *Abby*...?

Why not? She's playing *Krakoa*. She's playing *ORCHIS*.

Why wouldn't she be playing the *Progenitors*...?

So *little* imagination.

You keep saying "*the Progenitors*."

KRAKKOOM

When I think what you *mean*, Mr. Summers...

...is *my* Progenitors.

THE DIPLOMATIC ZONE.

You speak of payment in full measure, your Majesty.

I wonder if you know what that means.

What price can possibly be paid for evil on this scale? I fear it is already set in stone, Majestrix.

I fear it is total war.

What...?

Over my dead body. Hell, over Hulkling's dead body--

Then so it will be, Nova. If the Gods themselves stood in the way of vengeance--for this, vengeance must be taken.

It is out of your hands-- and mine.

Only Xandra can prevent it. And so I ask again.

What will the Shi'ar offer to take the place of their own blood?

I offer fire.

My fire--an inferno that will burn your pathetic Alliance where it lies if you dare to stand against your betters.

Rejoice, bold men of the Shi'ar. Raise your swords--and sing your hosannas.

Your King has returned.

BOVE TOP SECRET ++ ABOVE TOP SECRET ++ A
ES ONLY ++ BEYOND EYES ONLY ++ BEYOND EY
T ++ ABOVE TOP SECRET ++ ABOVE TOP SECR

GALACTIC SOCIETY IS MOVING TOWARD A STATE OF TOTAL WAR OR TOTAL PEACE.
EITHER WAY, THE SOL SYSTEM IS UNDERREPRESENTED AND VULNERABLE.
WE NEED TO TAKE OUR PROPER PLACE ON THE GALACTIC STAGE.
THIS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT FOR SOLVING THAT PROBLEM.

PHASE ONE: CULTIVATE AND PREPARE USEFUL ALLIES.

KRAKOA -- New Mutant Nation, founded by the X-Men. This is a PRIORITY ALLIANCE for various reasons:

- They've been useful in the past -- they talk tough but they're easily swayed and seldom ask questions.
- An entire nation of mutants is a limitless resource if properly controlled and directed.
- My on-off personal relationship with Henry McCoy/Beast may be useful.
- Gabriel Summers/Vulcan would be Krakoan royalty if he returned -- and he was the most disruptive force in galactic politics in a generation. Black Bolt returned from the Fault -- Vulcan could have survived as well.
- If so: the Vulcan strategy is to RETRIEVE, REPROGRAM and PLACE WITHIN KRAKOA.

ORBIS STELLARIS is an arms dealer specializing in xeno-genetics. He's discreet, and apparently has the means to do what I need done -- secure Vulcan and make him docile until we need him to be his old self again -- in return for credits up front and favors down the line. I think we can do business.

PHASE TWO: SIEZE OPPORTUNITIES.

- Krakoa is more useful that I'd have thought possible.
- The "X OF SWORDS" incident led to the retrieval of a lost S.W.O.R.D. Station [*cross-ref: "VESCORI"*] and a massive influx from a new and non-civilized mutant population. Only a matter of time before the obvious solution presents itself -- a local terraforming strategy.
- Meanwhile, following the "EMPYRE" incident, the galaxy is moving toward a "TOTAL PEACE" scenario with a side order of "ECONOMIC COLLAPSE" -- couldn't be better.
- The time to move is NOW.

PHASE THREE: CONSOLIDATE POWER.

- Quit Alpha Flight. Ensure my replacement is predictable -- if not, make plans to remove them.
- Pitch turning Krakoa's salvaged S.W.O.R.D. Station into a "mutant space agency." They'll say yes -- they're high on their own hype.
- Use "mutant circuits" to forge/gather meta-materials to force a "galactic economic miracle." Further macro-events [*cross-ref: "SNARKWAR," "KNULL"*] will only increase the need for that.
- Use the goodwill from saving the economy to get True System status for Sol -- along with a representative seat on the Galactic Council.
- Once the mutants terraform Mars -- and they WILL terraform Mars -- pitch that as the new Sol "capital world." The seat of power.
- Approach ORCHIS for an alliance off the back of that. Sacrifice a pawn if necessary. ORCHIS are shortsighted zealots -- always useful.

PHASE FOUR: TRIGGER CRISIS.

- Encourage friction between the Arakkii and the diplomatic/scientific community. The more tension there is, the easier it is to impose martial law when the hammer drops.
- Prime the Vulcan asset. Resurrection should break the "docility" programming and fully restore the Emperor Vulcan personality.
- Take advantage of events. Mutants stealing Mars will paint a target on their backs -- someone will take their shot. WHEN that happens -- not if -- is the time to strike, while Arakko is weakened.
- Leak the Shi'ar's "Shapeless Ridge" data to the Alliance, then pitch Sol -- ally to both factions -- as an obvious mediator. Host talks.
- During the talks, set Vulcan loose against Xandra. No matter who kills who, we're looking at galactic war within the week -- a civil war among the Shi'ar while both sides fight off the Kree/Skrull Alliance. Other Galactic factions will undoubtedly be drawn in.

PHASE FIVE: CRISIS BECOMES ADVANTAGE.

- Guilt the X-Men. They accepted Vulcan, they're responsible. They'll be frontline soldiers and mediators with the Shi'ar. Either the Arakkii fall in line as well, or (more likely) I can coerce the X-Men into forcing them back to Amenth, leaving Mars as a pure Diplomatic World -- S.W.O.R.D.'s first Global Station.
- The new S.W.O.R.D. takes the role of S.H.I.E.L.D. -- a global defense agency -- absorbing ORCHIS in the process. Then we approach Fury's contact list. The Avengers, the FF, anyone with pull on the Kree and the Skrulls. Our role is the voice of reason -- forcing the two sides to the negotiating table. The carrot and the stick in one.
- It'll take time. But when the dust settles, S.W.O.R.D. -- and Sol -- will be everything they were always meant to be.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

And that's *check and mate.*

X-Men Red #4 Variant by Stephanie Hans

Return of the King

21

[Resurrection_mod]
[Subj...Vulcan_[X]

THE QUIET COUNCIL OF KRAKOA

//FURTHER NOTES RE: VULCAN/GABRIEL SUMMERS//
//FOR DISTRIBUTION TO ALL COUNCIL MEMBERS//

Commander Brand of S.W.O.R.D. has approached me with what I consider to be an important concern: that with the sad loss of Erik Lehnsherr -- not merely one of my oldest and most valued friends, but also a verified Omega-level mutant -- Krakoa (and Arakko) find themselves dangerously underpowered at a critical moment in our history.

While I vehemently disagree with Erik's choices, I have no wish to deny him agency by attempting resurrection via non-standard means. However, the plain fact is that in these difficult times, Krakoa cannot remain an Omega short.

And so we come, again, to the matter of Gabriel Summers.

Following his death in ritual combat in Arakko's "Circle Perilous," after increasing displays of unstable behavior, it was judged best -- after consultation with his immediate family -- that Vulcan be moved to a place of tertiary importance in the resurrection queue until further notice, to give us all time to work out how to address his ongoing problems. However, with Magneto gone, I believe Commander Brand is right -- the time has come to bring Gabriel back to us. And though the issue of his mental state remains, I believe I have a working solution.

Telepathic surgery is a complex matter to begin with, and I would never alter a mutant's mind or memories -- that would be the ultimate mental violation. I simply will not do it under any circumstances. (Barring cases of absolute necessity, of course.)

That said, I see no ethical difficulty in *adding* information to a mind. We already offer telepathic downloads of the Krakoan alphabet to all mutants, and Harry Leland gratefully accepted an infusion of the geopolitical history he had missed out on before he accepted a place representing Krakoa in the U.N.

This would be a similar matter, but delivered while Vulcan's mind is being reseated in the new body -- a lightning-fast course of telepathic behavioral therapy to put Gabriel at ease on waking and give him the tools he needs to control his rage and paranoia moving forward.

Admittedly, I am not technically trained as a psychologist, nor has this been attempted before. But I have become something of an old hand at telepathic surgery in the last year -- and this will not be the first troubled mutant mind I have brought a measure of calm to during my time as an educator.

I have total confidence that I will succeed.

--Xavier

—

[Resurrection_proposal]
[Submitted...Xavier_[X]

For the record, Scott?

I don't like this at all.

ARBOR MAGNA. THEN.

I hear you, Alex. But *strategically*, it makes perfect sense.

If Erik's chosen to *stay dead*, we need ***powerhouses.*** And *this time*, I think Charles' idea is helpful.

I know *I'd* have preferred an information download in the egg. Hit the ground *running*...

Well, *Jean* could do that for you.

Actually...it's usually ***Emma*** who brings me back.

Nope. Not dissecting that one.

The *point* is-- this isn't just a *download*, Scott. This is a ***repair job.*** And maybe you trust *Emma* to play with your head...

...but do you trust Charles?

...

I make a point of not spying on anyone's *private thoughts*, Alex.

I do, however, have ***ears.***

This is *weird*. He's not hatching.

Eva-- let's do a quick age-up on the shell--

Sorry, Professor. Guess I'm just hoping this doesn't go sideways.

Like last time.

Nothing. It's his *first time* out of an egg, right?

Anyone else think this might be a ***Kate Pryde*** situation?

Right--when she instinctively tried to *phase* instead of *hatch*.

She needed a *psychic jump start*, something to get her moving...

Indeed. And I saw how Emma *did* it.

A little additional ***guidance***, that's all.

Let Gabriel *know* that life is *here*... only *waiting* for...

...him...

FWOOSH

AAAAHHH!

Professor!

What did you *do...?*

I--I didn't do anything. *I didn't put his mind back.*

He...he saw I was *holding* it...

...and he took it from me.

NOW...

Gabe? Is that *you* in there?

Are you *okay...?*

Yes. Yes, I am.

The shell is broken, brother.

NOW.

It's happening now.

THE DIPLOMATIC ZONE. NOW.

Cal'syee. I heard the good news--our marriage was *blessed*, as they say.

How's my ***son?***

Our *child*... is somewhere ***safe.***

Safe from the intrigues of the Shi'ar. Safe from *scientists* and their endless *experiments.*

Safe from us, Gabriel.

Ouch.

Though it seems you've no problem with *other* children being part of the intrigue. Better to throw your ***niece*** to the wolves, is that it?

That's "*your royal niece,*" Mr. Summers...

Shush.

Oh, "*Mr. Summers*" was my ***father.***

*I...*am ***Emperor Vulcan.***

Emperor no more. The days of your accursed rule are stricken from official memory--

Is that so? Well, I can understand the desire to pretend. I'm a little embarrassed by those days myself--not my best work.

I'll do so much better on my second reign...

Unbelievable.

Can someone X-affiliated tell me who was dumb enough to resurrect this creep?

The mad king? During a period of Shi'ar political unrest? Are you trying to start a war here?

He came out of the Fault alive, Nova.

What were we supposed to do, throw him back?

He started a galactic war for kicks, Joanna. He dropped nega-bombs on inhabited worlds to see the fireworks.

You don't throw that guy back into Hell.

You fire him out of a krutaking cannon.

Very evocative.

Shut it, War Crimes.

Gladiator-- you *knew* about this? You, of *all* people, know what could happen--

I serve the ***Shi'ar throne,*** Nova. And *Charles Xavier himself*--the Empress' *father*--pronounced Vulcan ***safe.***

In the face of that, we chose to respect *old alliances*...

...to choose... to choose ***mercy***...

What...?

What's happening...?

Kallark?

Gladiator!

Fun fact: *Strontians* are powered by their own *confidence.* They have an enlarged *prefrontal cortex,* just *buzzing* with electrical impulses.

As an ***Omega-level energy manipulator,*** I can *reroute* those impulses.

That's what ***I*** think of mercy.

"What could happen"? Oh, Nova. You stupid policeman.

It's happening now.

Vulcan--

Gabriel Summers.

You are hereby charged with *crimes against sentient life* under the *Pan-Worlds Treaty.*

Surrender now, or--

Or "*face immediate penalty*" from the galaxy's *last good cowboy?* *Please.*

What are you going to *do,* "Nova Prime"? Use the *Nova Force?*

This Nova Force?

AARRRGH--!

This is *Frenzy* calling *Brand!* ***Emergency alert!***

We need *S.W.O.R.D.* security to the *Shi'ar* Embassy!

Brand, *pick up--*

KRAK

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO. *THE KEEP.*

Brand!

Pick up the damn *comms!*

She'd be *pissed* if she knew you were ***already*** watching...

She's pissed at me *anyway.* It's only her sense of duty that keeps her in her post at this point.

It's a shame. At one time, I'd have let her as far into the inner circle as ***you,*** Mentallo...

That inner circle *paycheck* does buy the kind of luxuries you can't get in eco-hippy paradise.

Too bad for Frenzy. She was one of the ***best,*** but she caught the worst disease you can get in this game...

...caring what happens to the suckers.

PAIBOK!

NO!

AARRGHH--

That's the thing, Flumm. I *do* care--about ***everybody in the Sol System.***

Somebody's got to.

Somebody's got to care enough to be the bad guy.

THE WORLD FARM.

"Somebody's got to stay with the ship."

Yeah, because there's so much fighting to do out *here*.

Hello? Anyone *alive?* Do I need to fly back and tell the Five to cook up some more *eggs?*

If anyone can hear my voice, *please respond--*

BREEEEP

//THREAT DETECTED//

//END THREAT//

...

I didn't mean *you.*

"I'm not at home to nuisance callers today..."

...so I hope you'll excuse my rudeness in showing you out via the quickest way available.

Your violent deaths.

CHKOM

Thunderbird! Zsen!

I need him off-balance!

Tendons?

Tendons.

SHIK

SHIKK

Aaahh!

You feel that body's pain, huh?

CHOOM

Unnhh--

Useful intel.

Very useful. It seems the Overlord-Class was built to give *orders*, not to engage in *combat*-- I'll remember that.

Fortunately, I can call on *further* assistance in this very *room*.

Rise, my heralds. Your creator commands.

SSSSS

AH...

...THE CREATOR HAS GUESTS.

Aw, crap.

We're in *trouble*--I can **see** the power inside these three--

SUCH A COMPLIMENT. BUT YOU HAVE GREATNESS IN *YOU*, LITTLE SPEAKER-- A GREAT TOOL FOR OUR PURPOSE.

MAY I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK?

...

Fesi's thing was talking to *universes*, right?

That's right, John.

Better get your ***knife*** ready.

It doesn't matter *how* tough you are, Frenzy...

...you still need to breathe.

And fire just *eats* that oxygen right up, doesn't it?

Let her *go--*

Down, cowboy.

WHAM

You'd *think* you'd have gotten the message the *first* time.

There's something in you that loves to hurl itself at a ***hopeless cause,*** isn't there?

Gabriel-- it's not too late.

I promise you, this is ***not what you want...***

Oh, ***Cal'syee.*** What happened? The Deathbird ***I*** knew would *never* do this-- *bend to a throne.*

The fire in your eyes is lost, my love...

...but my fire burns forever.

Ugh.

Permission not to watch, boss?

Permission **denied,** Flumm.

What we do, we have to look at.

That's the **price** we pay for...

...Oh.

Oh no.

Oh, Gabriel.

I did *try* to warn you.

Wonderful things, Shi'ar image inducers. They even do the *voices.*

Xandra couldn't make it, Vulcan.

Fortunately, *I rule.*

A COSTA ++ I'M ROBERTO DA COSTA ++ I'M ROB
YOU'RE NOT ++ AND YOU'RE NOT ++ AND YOU'R
ES ++ SO STOP READING MY SECRET FILES ++ S

BRAND IS PLANNING SOMETHING.
SHE DIDN'T INVITE ME, SO IT'S PROBABLY NOT FUN.
I SHOULD PLAN MY OWN SOMETHING.

PHASE ONE: CHECK MY REFLECTION.

Style remains vital in these matters.
Am I still incredibly handsome and impeccably dressed?
I am. Fantastic, let's proceed.

(The moustache question remains. So much at stake -- if I failed to achieve the Total Selleck, my only option would be to hide my shame from the world and become the All-New Doctor Doom.
I can't risk it.
Or can I?)

PHASE TWO: WORK OUT BRAND'S NEXT MOVE.

She wants to expand Sol's influence -- and her own power. She's made Sol stronger, but she's run out of gifts to give -- so now what?

Now she makes someone else weak.

PHASE THREE: WHAT WOULD I DO? (EVIL VERSION)

Start a nice little Star War.
Set two of Sol's biggest allies against each other and play mediator.

Who fights who?
The Shi'ar Empire is very fragile right now -- Xandra's ready to transition to a Commonwealth. Not good for Sol -- we'd be one small system competing among hundreds.

So I start the war by taking her out.

PHASE FOUR: WHAT DO I DO? (NON-EVIL)

I have a vital hot tub at 3 p.m.
Just pull something out of the files.

Fake my death and jump out of my own coffin? Not feeling it today.

The Red Lagoon was a giant robot all along? Construction isn't finished.

The ~~President~~ Empress is me in an image inducer? Boom.

PHASE FIVE: HOT TUB.

No secrets in a hot tub.

ROBERTO ACCOMPLISHED.

I will *burn you alive for this--*

Will you? We *both* eat solar energy, remember.

And I don't need to take it from the *sun* when I can take it from *you*--isn't that how it goes?

But please-- *give it a go.*

Find out which of us is hotter.

...

You are a *distraction,* Da Costa. From Xandra Xavier's ***charred bones*** crunching between my ***teeth.***

And if she's not *here...*

...I know exactly where to find her.

He'd have incinerated you where you sat, you know.

Obviously. But even so-- ***I'm better looking.***

It's the *moral* victory that's important.

THE AUTUMN PALACE.

Vulcan--this is Abigail Brand via Mentallo.

I'm going to need you to come in, Gabriel. This is not a smart move--

Tell your pet telepath to stay out of my head, Brand.

Telepaths...anger me. Especially if they're of Xavier's line...

...like Xandra Throne-Stealer!

I know you're here! I can feel you! Scratching at my mind!

I can feel--

You.

I've been dreaming of this moment... this fight... since before I died...

Really?

Sorry I kept you waiting.

X-Men Red #9 Variant by Ivan Shavrin

The New Age

22

At the Autumn Palace
Two forces met
To decide our fate.

For the soul of this world
The Storm stood fast
Against the Summer.

For the soul of this world
Their battle raged
The Fire and The Sky

Made grim war on this ground
The broken heart
Of our Broken Land.

I was there, close enough
To feel their power
To know their resolve.

I tell you, I was there!
It shook the earth!
It shook certainties!

Were you there? I was there!
If you were there
You'd need no telling.

The Earth and Sea waited
Holding their breath
For the coming end.

Which spirit would prevail?
When we emerged
Who would be victor?

At the Autumn Palace
Two forces met
To forge a New Age.

-- Lodus Logos, *"At The Autumn Palace"*,
Taken from the Collected Works.

THE PLANET ARAKKO.

Understand me, Ororo of the Storm.

I am reborn. The shell is broken and the fire inside is free.

This will not go as it went before...

Before, I went *easy* on you, little King.

Make your move.

Just remember.

You had your chance.

THE AUTUMN PALACE FALLS.

THE WORLD FARM.

SUCH BEAUTIFUL POWER...

I WONDER, MY FELLOWS--WOULD OUR MASTER LIKE US TO LET IT *LOOSE* FROM ITS CAGE?

TO LET THE SPEAKER-TO-SPACE SPEAK *BABEL*--TURN THE LANGUAGE OF THE STARS AND WORLDS TO *GIBBERISH?*

TO REDUCE ALL SIGNAL TO NOISE?

IF OUR SUBLIME OVERLORD *DESIRES* IT...

N-no. Do **not**. Please.

OH, BUT OF *COURSE*, GREAT STELLARIS.

YOU'RE WHO WE MEANT.

Anyone else feel like the wheels are coming off the wagon here?

I'm gonna take the green one. He's got two *mouths*, I've got two *fists*-- ***the math checks out.***

Let's make that *Plan B*, John.

Khora? *Plan A.*

Using *your* weapon to boost *his?* None of **Arakko** would accept such an insult...

But the Askani'son thinks *differently*--and I have come to *agree*, sister.

This was *never* weakness--but ***strength upon strength.***

And I was pretty strong to *start* with, if I say so myself.

Too strong, even. There were times--*nnh!*--when my telekinesis threatened to ***burn me out.***

So I *used* it...

...to control the Techno-Organic virus inside me.

KRRK-KRKK

KRUSHH

That's right.

Come to Daddy.

HMM. A COMPLICATION.

Glad you think so.

Let's crack open that shell and *talk*, Orbis Stellaris. ***Man-to-man...***

...and quite ***literally*** face-to-face.

ARAKKO.

And is that *your* move, Ororo Not-a-Queen? When I bring the *sun* to your door?

Not falling over?

Surviving, little King.

It's what I've done since the day I was born.

You are a *furnace--I* am the ***Arctic.*** You brandish *flame--**I hold the lightning.***

We are ***evenly matched.***

Are we?

You were too *proud* to die. Too *fearful.* But the ***Son of Summer*** has visited that cold country and ***returned.***

Reinvigorated and *restored--*with ***Hell's own fire*** in my hand.

The Arctic *melts.* The planet *burns.* And *I am that burning,* Ororo Never-Died.

So in the end...*you will fall.*

S.W.O.R.D. STATION TWO
THE KEEP.

So, you found ***Storm***, at least...

Vulcan found Storm, Mentallo. And it's *where* he found her. Where he was *led*. The ***Autumn Palace***--HQ of the ***Brotherhood of Arakko.***

But my scans told me Magneto's old house was ***empty.***

Psychic whammy, huh? Sorry I didn't *spot* it, boss--

And there's nothing wrong with the *equipment*--so the problem was me.

Not *seeing what was right there.*

That's the thing. I've been trained in ***psychic defense*** on a *dozen worlds.*

I even took Charles Xavier's own *personal* psi-defense course--his "*red triangle*" protocol.

Well, uh, Xandra's pretty *powerful,* I hear...

Not powerful enough to get to me without me *knowing*--unless she was right up close. ***In this room.***

And I've got my *red triangle* going now. If she was *that* close, I'd ***see*** her...

...unless she used a *relay.*

A *fellow* psi-talent--*to carry her signal.*

He wouldn't need much psi-power of his *own* either. He could be a *complete loser.*

Green Room--*bodyslide by zero. Sidearm.* ***Loaded.***

Brand, c'mon-- just, just *think* about this--

Red triangle. You're *locked out,* Flumm. But I do see the *funny side* of this.

I took you in-- after all your *A.I.M. snafus*--because your loyalty goes to the ***highest bidder.***

Brand--

And I honestly thought that was ***me.*** When Fury turned *moonman,* I got the key to the *black budget.*

So who's got more money than ***S.H.I.E.L.D.,*** Marvin? Who hires from ***A.I.M.?***

Do I even need to ask?

Or should I just play the Mission: Impossible ***theme right now--***

Oof.

Cold burn, Brand.

Am I really *that* predictable?

Please.

Be gentle.

KA-BOOM

DISGUSTING.

THE GLORY OF THE PHALANX CONTAGION-- REDUCED TO THIS.

A PRIMATE FINDS A PRICELESS CRYSTAL AND USES IT TO BASH ANOTHER APE'S SKULL...

I CANNOT WATCH, BROTHERS. I WILL NOT WATCH.

IT OFFENDS MY SIGHT.

AAAHHHRR--

I'm back.

They-- they stopped *looking* at me--

Then *do something!*

You have more power than *any of us*--

But I can't *use* it--not in a place with no *windows!*

I need to see the ***stars***-- or a landmark or *something!* It's how my power *works!*

I need to know where I am--

Oh, little shaper.

Little *brother.* ***Mother's child.*** You are my *like*-- my ***kin.***

And Lactuca will always know where you are.

Oh.

Well, that's different.

NO--

Deadly.

How deadly? Where did you *put* them...?

Outside. All the way outside.

But I think that's where they might be from.

Well, we've got my *T/O* back--and any intel it gathered.

As well as what you saw, Zsen...

...though *that* intel looks *redundant* now.

Whenever you're *ready*, Eden--

"--take us *home*."

//END THREAT//

//END THREAT//

Oh, hey, Eden. Just *me*?

I'm dead on my *feet*, mate. I'm not carrying a whole *spaceship*.

Too *bad*...

"...but I guess I can always make *another*."

//THREAT//

//ENDED//

"For a moment there, I really thought I'd *killed* you..."

...your Majesty.

Many have, Commander. Yet *here I am.*

And I am currently in telepathic contact with ***Nathan Summers***-- who has witnessed *many things*--

--all *fully admissible* as evidence, both under the Pan-Worlds Treaty and the Shi'ar's own law.

You flew *too close to the sun*, Commander Brand. And in so doing, you attempted to foment *interstellar war*--and conspired to ***remove me from my throne.***

What say you in your defense?

As your forebears would have told the Skrulls and Kree--galactic peace makes for *strong neighbors*, and I'd rather have *weak* ones.

I've seen what happens when your home system can't *compete.*

I was there.

An *old* excuse. And one I'm sure you've rehearsed *many times*--to help you *sleep* at night.

You truly have *nothing else to tell me...?*

Only that I copied Kid Cable's tech the day we met.

Bodyslide--

NO--

SOMEWHERE VERY SECRET.

--by one.

Pick yourself up. Dust yourself off.

Start all over *again*--

Abigail Thanriagulaxus.

YOU? How did you--?

How do you know my *name...?*

Your grand plans are *dust,* Abigail Born-as-Axus-Ended. The road you walked *ends here.*

You are ***enemy of Arakko***--and for our enemies, there is only ***destruction.***

Destruction *of all that you are.*

And at the end of *that* road?

Is ***what comes next.***

NOTHING!

You have nothing! I can see it, Ororo of the Storm! I see every move you make!

All your power is going to defense--controlling the inferno I summon to do my bidding.

But your snows are gone! The wind you ride is dry as dust! The sky is fire!

Where is your weather now?

There is none. I have stolen the sky.

No throne, no crown--how can you battle the Summer-son? The very King of Kings?

What do you have left?

...

The rope-a-dope.

Do it now.

HSSSSSS

KRRR

You...you needed your **team** to fight me? *Waiting in ambush? You needed help?*

Are these the warriors of Arakko? I had *respect* for you...

We have *learned*--and *you* have learned ***nothing.*** Even *now*, the only thing you respect is the *empty heirarchy of power.*

So be it. Show him *our* power, Lodus.

It will be my pleasure...

...to **seat** *this king in his* **newest throne.**

A **mysterium** *throne fit tight and snug,* ***measured for all time...***

NO!

NNNGGHH!

Will it *hold* him?

The mysterium will *absorb* his fire--be *strengthened* by it, even. I think he *could* escape--but it would require a ***subtlety of approach.***

I do not think he *will.*

But he remains an *Omega*--and one who grew ***stronger in death.*** He may evolve *again...*

I...I am *king...*

...or he may ***not.***

Then we ***must.*** Arakko is changing to meet *new threats*--including ***his.***

And if our new tactics are called *"help"* on our new world...let us *embrace* that word at last.

And help each other.

In the name of ***Brotherhood.***

[Report....[S.W.O.R.D]
[From.....Cable]

AFTER-ACTION REPORT :: NATHAN SUMMERS/CABLE

I'll admit -- I'm disappointed that Abigail Brand managed to escape, especially if she used my bodysliding technology to do it. It's not like we didn't know she had access to it or how to block it if need be.

(Private addendum for Roberto -- I was your Headmaster too, young man, and I'm pretty sure I taught you the parable of the scorpion and the frog. Come find me when you work out which you are this time.)

I'm glad Vulcan is safe in a stasis cell and that others are safe from him -- strange as it may sound, I'm loath to hand him over to the Shi'ar for trial; for all that he's done, he's my uncle. Luckily, they're going to have their hands full mollifying the Kree/Skrull Alliance -- Roberto's connections there smoothed his little stunt over, but relations are still on very thin ice. Something else for Storm to watch for, in her role as Voice of Sol -- and for S.W.O.R.D., of course.

Wiz-Kid is taking over as Station Commander, with me retaining my role as Security Chief -- the Agent of S.W.O.R.D., if you will. Taki's got what it takes, and I'm happier in the field. Manifold, Frenzy and Random are happy to work under the new management too -- even Khora was interested in a role as our Arakkii liaison. Mentallo quit to go spend some of the money Roberto paid him, but I'm sure we'll see him again.

And John Proudstar told me to go [redacted] myself and that any time I wanted, he'd pull my head off and shove it so far up my [redacted] that it'd pop right back out of my pencil neck. So clearly the ol' Summers charm is winning him over. He won't resist these cookies I'm baking for him.

Who does that leave? Weaponless Zsen.

She's not coming back to Arakko -- whatever business remains between her and the rest of her family, working with Khora didn't resolve it. I gave her Blackjack's number and wished her the best -- after she'd done what I hired her to do.

Her gift is to paint the truth. She never saw how that could be a weapon, and maybe in a strict combat setting it wouldn't be -- but as a tool for gathering intelligence, it has definite possibilities. Telepathy, X-ray vision, radar sense -- all these things can be blocked or shielded from. How do you block the truth of who you are?

I asked her to paint Orbis Stellaris.

The results were...troubling. The image file is attached to this report, so you can see for yourself -- but certain things jumped out. For one, there's an old-world quality to the setting. Edwardian or Victorian. Polished brass telescopes... a bullet in the moon's eye before cinema even was... Cavorite and heat rays... He was sickly, thin as a grey alien... I'm rambling. This is what it is to see Zsen's art.

And there are the playing cards. Scattered everywhere in the scene, in every place you look. Seemingly haphazard but forming an intricate pattern. And all the same card...

A black ace.

[Report....[S.W.O.R.D]
[Subj.....Multiple]

THE WORLD FARM.

Open.

Open, damn you!

Emergency override! Open housing!

Good. Good.

Progenitors-- this is your overlord. Prepare a new **Orbis Stellaris** shell.

This ancient body won't last out the day without proper medical support...and I refuse to die.

I simply have *too much to do*. The mutants of Earth have requested my *undying enmity*--my **vengeance in full measure**--

--and Nathan Essex is happy to deliver.

In spades.

X-Men Red #10 Variant

by Mike McKone
& Morry Hollowell

Storm's Seven

23

THE RUINS OF A BROKEN LAND

Much time has passed since the founding of the mutant nation of Krakoa... and the great promise that the nation represented has been corrupted by the snake they allowed into their garden. Mister Sinister has used his position of power to secretly clone Moira MacTaggert to exploit her mutant gift of resetting reality to give himself 'save points' in his grand machinations.

Through trial and error, Sinister successfully managed to implant his own DNA into the resurrection process, bringing a majority of the Quiet Council under his control. However, Storm, having given up her Cerebro backup in solidarity of Arakko, has remained untouched by Sinister's machinations.

The same cannot be said for Arakko with the planet having been destroyed and it's survivors plagued by Sinister's creations. But Storm and her Brotherhood of Mutants aren't prepared to bow down without a fight...

[STORM]

[IRONFIRE]

[DESTINY]

[MYSTIQUE]

[CABLE]

[KHORA]

[WIZ-KID]

"Yes.

"I remember how Arakko died.

"I remember confronting the *Quiet Council*. Arakko had changed for the *better*, Krakoa only for the *worse*.

"I wanted to know the reason *why*.

"I found out."

I escaped only via a *psychic fail-safe* implanted by my fellow Arakkii.*

We were ready to go to war then and there. But we were *advised*... by *cooler heads*... to *wait*.

*see *SINS OF SINISTER #1*.

"We marshaled our forces. We called in our favors. We grew our strength.

"We were ready for *anything*...

"...but we weren't ready for *everything*.

"*Everything at once*.

"They blamed the attack on the *Skrulls*--propaganda for further conflicts on Sinister's mad horizon.

"*Augmented troops,* they claimed, like the Super-Skrulls of old.

"But we knew them for what they were--his *Chimeras.* While we'd planned, so had *he*--and he left *nothing* to chance.

"But we were *of Arakko,* and so we *fought.*

"We fought against *all hope.* We fought *knowing we would lose.*

"Because that is what it is to be *of the Broken Land...*"

...even when the land is *broken for all time.*

Now our people are *scattered to the winds of space--* or *here,* in hiding among the asteroids that were once the fertile fields of *Arakko.*

Perhaps if we'd gone *against* your kind advice--if we'd struck *earlier*--we'd have had a *chance...*

...but *you* told us to wait.

Look at me, Irene Adler. *Look me in the eye.*

How do you think I feel about that?

IT IS A DARK TIME FOR THE PEOPLE OF ARAKKO. FOLLOWING THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THEIR ADOPTED WORLD BY THE FORCES OF SINISTER, THE FEW SURVIVING ARAKKII ARE SCATTERED ACROSS SPACE -- LIVING AS REFUGEES AND MERCENARIES FOR THE HIGHEST BIDDER.

HOWEVER, A SMALL HANDFUL OF WARRIORS REMAIN IN THE SOL SYSTEM -- HIDDEN, LIKE A NEEDLE IN A COSMIC HAYSTACK, AMONG THE TEEMING WRECKAGE OF THE PLANET THAT THEY ONCE CALLED... THEIR HOME.

FROM THIS SECRET BASE, UNKNOWN TO THE SINISTER REGIME, A CRACK SQUADRON OF SIX LOST SOULS -- EACH ONE THE BEST THERE IS AT WHAT THEY DO -- FIGHT A WAR WITHOUT END AGAINST THE EVIL THAT SMASHED THEIR LAST HOPE FOR PEACE...

THEY ARE...

STORM AND THE BROTHERHOOD

Clearly, you haven't *forgiven* me, Storm.

But you won't *kill* me either--at least, not today. ***That I know.***

This is not the place to stress the *infallibility* of your *predictions*, Destiny.

If your predictions can ***fail***, the prediction you made for us can be *forgiven.*

But if you were just arranging the *chess pieces* for later--*choosing a more opportune hour for our death*--then ***you should not have come here.***

If you came here at all.

Jon?

SHNAK

...

Who's there?

This isn't Destiny.

Body language is off. Vocal inflection's too precise.

AAAHH!

And I never forget a heat signature...

...Mystique.

Fine.

You-- nnh!--you caught me.

Though you could've picked a less agonizing method...

Could've. Didn't.

And anything I *stab*, you grow *back*--so don't play for sympathy.

Jon Ironfire. Ororo's gruffest *attack dog.*

From the *rebel without a cause* to the *Inner Circle*--how the mighty have ***risen.***

Though I thought only *Omegas* could serve on the Great Ring. Is that a rule that *died with your planet?*

Or are you the Omega of ***molten metal blood...?***

I'll let you know if I ever hit a limit.

Enough. You didn't come for a *sparring match,* Raven--verbal or otherwise.

So why ***are*** you here?

To protect my *wife,* obviously. She ***predicted*** she'd be safe--but some things you don't gamble with.

So I came wearing her *face...*

...to deliver her *message.*

How would you like Arakko to live again?

"Nathaniel Essex has a secret *cloning facility* dedicated to a secret *clone*...

"...a clone of ***Moira MacTaggert.***

"It has her *activated mutant gene*--the power to reset the timeline to the *first moment of her life*, should that life ***end.***

"The *clone's* life began almost ***ten years ago.*** It was a *save point* of some kind..."

...that will save us from ***Sinister.***

Destroy the facility. Kill the clone. ***Reset time.***

There's no *guarantee* that events won't play out the *same way.* But there's at least a ***chance*** to save everything...

...and all you have to do is ***end it.***

...

Jon?

Assemble the Brotherhood.

We have a mission.

THE BROTHERHOOD

STORM

ORORO MUNROE HAS CONTROL OVER ALL WEATHER. AS THE LAST TRUE SURVIVOR OF THE GREAT RING, SHE TAKES ARAKKO'S DESTRUCTION VERY PERSONALLY.

CABLE

NATHAN SUMMERS IS THE ULTIMATE PSYCHIC SOLDIER. AFTER THE SINISTER BETRAYAL, HE BONDED WITH THE COLLECTIVE MIND XILO TO BECOME LIVING HISTORY.

KHORA

KHORA CAN BOOST THE ABILITIES OF ANYONE NEAR HER. DAUGHTER OF THE LEGENDARY FISHER KING, SHE SHARES HIS TALENT FOR STRIKING FROM THE SHADOWS.

WIZ KID

TAKESHI MATSUYA CAN CREATE AND COMMAND ANY TECHNOLOGY HE IMAGINES – INCLUDING THE CLOAKING DEVICES HIDING THE BROTHERHOOD FROM SINISTER.

IRONFIRE

JON IRONFIRE CAN TRANSMUTE HIS MOLTEN BLOOD INTO ANY METAL KNOWN, AND EXTRUDE IT IN THE FORM OF WEAPONS, ARMOR AND EVEN HIS TRADEMARK HORNS.

QUICK

LOCKLO MARSHALL IS THE FASTEST BEING STILL LIVING. THE BROTHERHOOD'S YOUNGEST MEMBER, HER LIGHT-HEARTED EXTERIOR HIDES A PAST FILLED WITH LOSS.

GUEST STARRING:

MYSTIQUE

RAVEN DARKHOLME CAN BECOME ANYONE SHE CHOOSES – BUT WHO IS THE REAL PERSON BENEATH?

MUIR ISLAND.

Bodyslide--

--by *seven.*

We should have *known.* Once upon a time, ***Muir Island*** was Moira MacTaggert's foremost *research facility*--

--of *course* Sinister's twisted sense of humor would put the Moira Lab *here.*

Under the ***real*** Moira's nose.

According to Destiny's ***vision,*** Sinister's lab isn't in the building itself but buried in the rock *underneath* it...

Assuming we *trust* her. Or her *wife*...

It'll be fine, Jon. Watch *this*.

How are those *guns* I fabricated for you back on *Asteroid S*, Mystique?

Not bad at all. Why do you *ask*?

Is it because I'm going to use them on *all of you* as soon as we're done here?

Try it, lady--

--we'll see who's faster!

So there's *that*.

But Loolo's reaction time *aside*--

--the *security lock* on the guns won't *let* her target a Brotherhood member.

Not to *mention*--

--that we're all about to be *way* too busy to squabble among ourselves.

Muir Island is defended.

Cross-referencing my *bio-history* for **Chimera ingredients.**

Looks like these are half **Maggot** and half **Marrow...**

...every bone in their bodies is a flesh-eater!

With their numbers, they'll *overwhelm* us if we don't put them down **quickly...**

No problem!

Quick's--

--who--

--I--

--am!

Good work, Loolo.

*You, Cable, **Khora** and **Mystique** continue to defend the **surface--***

--and the *rest of us* will dig up Sinister's *secrets!*

A whirlwind strong enough to tear up the *living rock*...remind me why you needed the *rest of us?*

She doesn't.

I *might.*

I can feel something *waiting* for us. Not so much *energy*...but its *absence*...

More of Sinister's *Chimeras?*

Not like he never runs *dry.*

True. We can expect resistance from his soldiers.

But what they're *defending*...

...is a Chimera unlike any I've seen.

A living force-field...

Unuscione genes. Amped by who knows what else-- *Skids? Armor?* How *many* mutants have force-field powers?

I doubt even a *teleporter* could breach it... but maybe they won't *have* to.

Leave this to me.

That's not your *usual* tech, Taki...

A little something I've been saving for *just this occasion.*

Can you two hold off the goons while I *work?*

Can do.

Hnnh--

UHHR!

AOOW!

Your "rain of pain" move--I remember how effective that was in the *Genesis War.*

And against most foes, it would be *enough*...but against *Chimeras,* it needs a little ***extra.***

Fortunately, your iron blood *conducts.*

SHRAK

That just leaves the ***unbreakable shield.***

Of course, the question isn't *how* you break it...

...it's "*why would you bother?*"

Activating in ***three, two, one--***

Flash of light from the hole. *Probably* a good sign...

Loolo-- I'm going to increase your speed. If you can take them all down at once, it'll buy us a moment to regroup and check ***below us...***

Readywhenyouare--

--!

Mystique...?

Something's *wrong!* She's ***glitching!***

That's not *Mystique!*

Why bother to *break* something... when you can just ***pick it up and move it around?***

I see.

Excellent work, Taki.

Teleporting the entire lab-- *force-field and all--* was a stroke of genius.

Why, *thank you.*

It buys us *time.*

Rather than scrambling to dismantle the field *here,* we can return to *base* and switch the clone off at our--

AARRGH--

Well, that's the thing.

NO--

It's not at *your* base.

Did you spot me this time, Jon?

No--because you were looking at my body language, my vocal inflection...looking for the ***fake tells*** I fed you for ***years.***

And you were looking at the Shi'ar ***hard-light hologram*** of me up above--perfect down to the *thermal signature.*

Anyway, *speaking* of alien tech...

I'll ***kill*** ***you***--

HHRAAARGH!

...Cable never *did* have a monopoly on *translocation.*

Bye.

Damn it... I *failed* you, Goddess...

I keep ***failing*** ***you...***

NO.

Not yet.

Everyone! Down here!

We need medical evac NOW!

Mystique *tried*...killing blow...

But *she* can't kill us. *Sinister* can't kill us.

Arakko survives, Jon...

"...and we'll *find her. Wherever she hides."*

THE WORLD FARM.

SYSTEM-SIZED LABORATORY OF THE PROGENITOR RACE.

Mystique has *returned*--with our *prize.*

The Brotherhood took care of Sinister's *defenses,* and *she* took care of the Brotherhood. With their leader *dead,* they'll be no threat to ***either*** of us.

It's *ironic,* really. If we hadn't lured ***Ororo*** into action, the timeline ***would*** have reset.

Tomorrow, a Quiet Council vote will go *against* Sinister, and he'll decide to *cut his losses...* ***too late.***

I know ***how*** he *thinks,* Irene. This chaos he's unleashed was his idea of a ***controlled experiment.***

A shame-- ***for him***--that he won't be the one to control it.

But I'm *curious.* I know why I won't undo the last ten years--what about *you?*

What do you get from a diseased reality like this one?

You really can't *guess?*

It's such a simple answer. In this world... *my wife is alive.*

And some things you don't gamble with.

No. We have that in *common,* I suppose--we play ***long games,*** you and I, and we like to play them ***safe.***

But ***nothing is forever,*** Destiny-- you of *all* people know that.

And at the *end* of this game, there's only ***one*** winning card.

There can only be one...

...who has dominion.

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1 Variant

by Arthur Adams & Edgar Delgado

No Hope

24

IT IS A TIME OF GALACTIC WAR.

The Sinister Council's RED DIAMOND EMPIRE is caught in a death struggle with the forces of the INTERSTELLAR COMPACT, led by the mysterious ORBIS STELLARIS – himself secretly a variant form of Sinister enacting his own master plan.

Armed with this knowledge, the underground freedom fighters known as THE BROTHERHOOD battle against both Sinister and Stellaris to free the peoples of the galaxy from their schemes – and to avenge PLANET ARAKKO, the first casualty of the SINISTER WARS.

During a doomed mission to the ice planet VARON, the rival insurgent cell known as FREEDOM FORCE was able to transmit the location and schematics of the Compact's latest and most terrifying weapon – a mobile command post the size of a solar system – to ARAKKO BASE.

Their heroic sacrifice has prompted a long-forgotten player in this deadly game to make her final move...

DEEP SPACE. EXACT LOCATION UNKNOWN.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE SINISTER TAKEOVER.

This is *Approach Control* to *Starship Ananke*--signal received, tractor beam engaged. You're locked to dock.

Welcome to ***Arakko Base***-- *hope you survive the experience.*

But to make *sure*, I'm going to need this cycle's *code* from you. Over.

Mandragora autumnalis. Devil's Candle.

That's a *match, Starship Ananke*--

Wait.

Starship Ananke, this is ***Noh-Varr***, Base Command.

Give me the *next* cycle's code.

Sir, we haven't *generated* that code yet--it ***doesn't exist***--

Amaranthus caudatus.

Love Lies Bleeding.

Okay--*uh, computer*, generate new hangar code for *next cycle*...

Holy Glorp. That's... that's an ***exact match***, *Starship Ananke.*

How could she--

It's what she does.

Signal the ***Old Lady***, Ensign.

"Tell her our *guest* is the *real thing.*"

Destiny.

Noh says it's really *you* this time--in the ancient flesh.

What could bring you out of your safe, comfortable *bunker* and into the *flark's nest?*

Not your *mockery*, Khora. Where's the *Old Witch?*

If you mean the *Goddess*, show a little *respect...*

Don't start with that nonsense, Ironfire, you ridiculous man.

Even ***Exodus*** grew out of his one-man religion. He left *his* messiah to be *eaten alive by Chitauri.*

Well, that's *Sinisters* for you.

Unable to see anything ***greater than themselves...***

Give me strength.

And *you*, Cable-- or is it ***X-Man?*** Too *worm-ridden* now to give a damn about your own *daughter's* death?

This body is more *history* than *humanity* now-- and there's a dead loved one on *every page*, Irene Adler.

They will all be avenged.

And what about *my* dead, you ***maggot-addled corpse?*** *Where is my vengeance?*

What about Mystique?

My love... *please.* I am *begging* you, be *sensible.*

This *recklessness*-- it isn't you--

Yes, it is.

It's just the part of me you never ***liked.***

We're the reason this timeline's still *ticking,* remember? I say we *fight* for it. The Brotherhood can't win their rebellion ***alone...***

Raven, ***stop--***

...and the *truth* is that I don't want to spend the rest of forever as a ***keepsake in your vault.***

If you *love* something, set it *free,* Irene.

"If it comes back..."

On your feet, Freedom Force! *For the rebellion!*

Who the hell wants to live forever?

I wanted to live forever. With *her.*

Or for as much of it as we could *steal.*

With her in my arms, *decades* flew by like summer days. It was *enough* for me--but not for her.

So she died for ***your damned cause***-- to keep some backwater world "*free,*" whatever that even means.

A red diamond on the forehead, a golden ball on the flag. What is *any* of it worth?

Everything.

Commander on deck!

But "*if you have to* ***ask,***" as they used to say.

It's been a *long time,* Irene. How's that *bunker* of yours?

How's *your* war against the *entire galaxy?*

Not as *lonely,* I suspect--nor as *cold.*

I'm sure it *won't* be--when the ***Compact*** swarms this sector like *flies.* If I could find you, *so can they...*

Yeah? Is that a ***threat,*** faceless?

Easy, Ganna.

Sorry, Commander.

Obviously, it's a threat. But we needn't be *rude.*

Is there a ***carrot*** to go with that stick, Irene? How can our humble rebellion *help you* today?

Once, we offered you a chance to end all this ***cleanly.*** At the time, it was a *lie*-- I simply had *too much to lose.*

But now? ***Raven is dead.*** The galaxy is on ***fire.*** We've ***all*** lost everything.

It's time to end this phase of the game, Ororo.

It's time to kill Moira for real.

THE MISSION

One hundred years have passed since Mister Sinister gained control over mutantkind using clones of Moira MacTaggert to create "save points" as he ran genetic experiments, injecting his own DNA and corrupting the mutant resurrection process. But when his Moira Engine was stolen, Sinister himself became trapped in a hell of his own making, and the rest of the universe tore itself apart as his genetic experiments began a quest of universal domination.

Now Storm leads an underground group of mutant freedom fighters known as the Brotherhood to stand against Sinister in all his forms. Meanwhile, Destiny sought to further her own agenda: protecting the existence of her wife, Mystique -- even going so far as to turn her back on her fellow mutants and allying with Orbis Stellaris.

However, Orbis Stellaris is himself a secret variant form of Mister Sinister, and he has plans of his own...

[STORM]

[DESTINY]

[MYSTIQUE]

[IRONFIRE]

[KHORA]

[X-MAN]

[GANNA]

[NOH-VARR]

WARP SPACE.

Brothership to all ***X-Fighters***--this is the ***Accuser*** at the helm. ***Storm, Destiny*** and ***Khora*** are on the *bridge* and we're two minutes to *drop-out.*

X-Fighters, you launch on drop. ***Sound off.***

X-Man in ***X-Fighter Gold.*** Ready.

Shockjock in ***X-Fighter Blue.*** Ready.

Ironfire in ***X-Fighter Red.*** Extruding *interface...*

...and ready.

You know, just 'cause your *metal blood* lets you link directly with *your* X-Fighter? Don't make you a better ***pilot,*** old man.

Bet you a marker ***I*** come back with most kills--

Can the *chatter,* Shockjock. This isn't a *game.*

This is ***history.***

Drop-out in three--two--one--

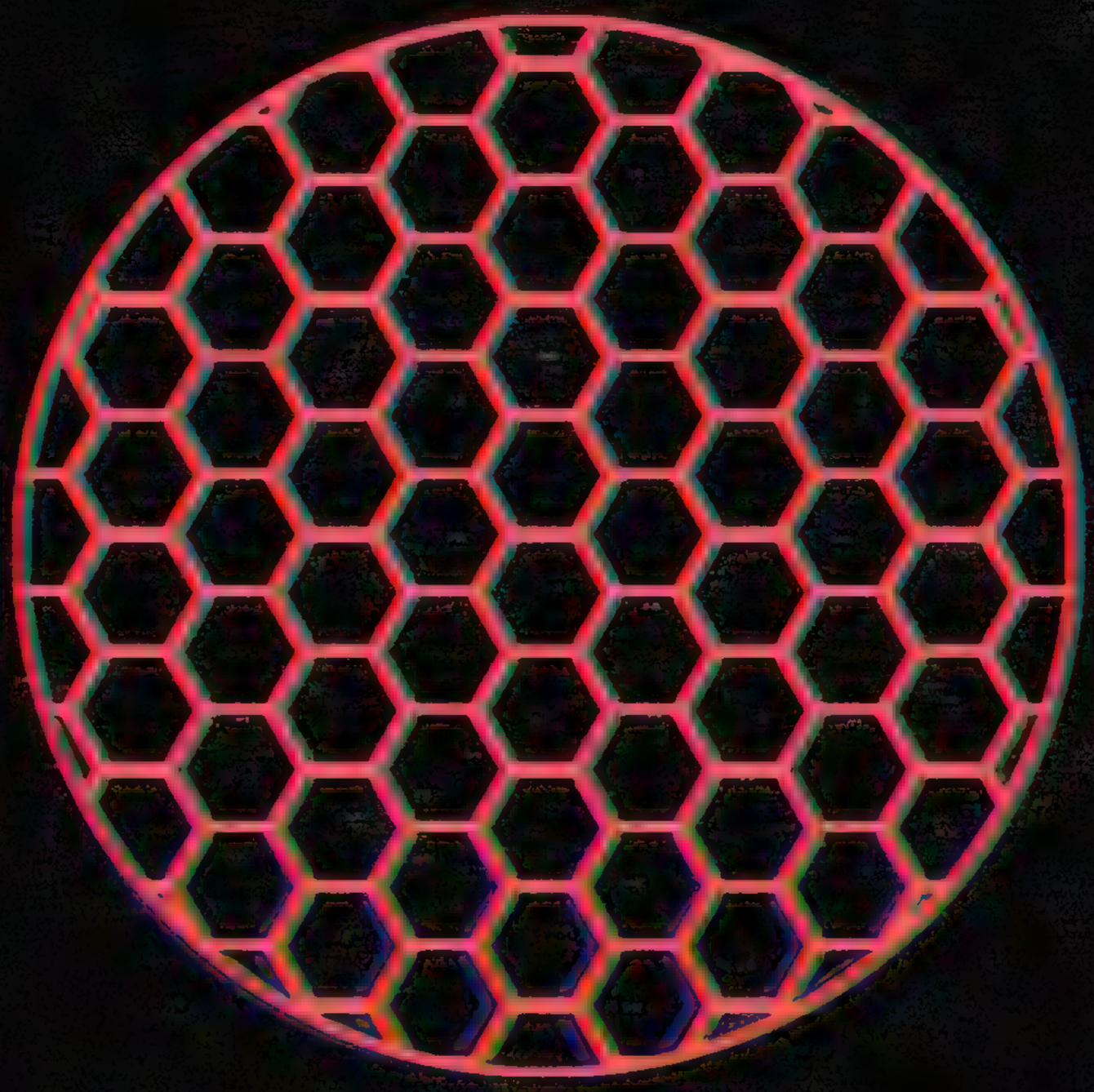
--zero! We've dropped out of warp--all units launch!

This is war.

And we have met the enemy.

...

You think?



THE DEATH SPHERE

The life's work of ORBIS STELLARIS, Overlord of the Interstellar Compact. Essentially a scaled-up version of his own mobile life-support shell, it allows his base of operations — the system-sized computer known as THE WORLD FARM — to travel anywhere in the galaxy, enabling total domination of all worlds under the Compact's aegis. In addition, the enslaved denizens of the World Farm — the sentient macro-computer civilization known as THE PROGENITORS — are devoting all their incredible processing power to

Stellaris' long-term projects.

Orange Alert. Orange Alert. The Sphere is under attack.

Orbis Stellaris to bridge control. Orange Alert.

Enough. I'm **here**-- and in poor temper.

Where did this attack come from? How did the Red Diamond forces cloak themselves so--?

The **Brothership...?**

The rebel forces are attacking us *directly?* With **three X-Fighters** and a flagship ready for **scrap?**

Are they *desperate*, or has the Old Witch finally gone senile...?

Counter-measures, Overlord?

Let's not task Progenitors. *Their* systems are needed within the Sphere--my research **cannot be delayed.**

Standard fighter craft should be enough. Let's say...

"...all of them."

A hundred to one. At least.

Storm does know what she's *doing*, right?

I *hope* you know what you're ***doing...***

THE BRIDGE OF THE *BROTHERSHIP.*

Khora's gift is to boost *other* mutant gifts. That should help you with *accuracy*--and ***detail.***

X-Man will read your mind and broadcast what *you* see to the *others...*

And perhaps all he'll broadcast is their ***inevitable deaths.*** Even ***I*** can only game the future *so far*--***Raven's*** fate was proof of that...

Or proof of a more *human* failing, perhaps.

What do you ***see,*** Irene?

I see a pitched *battle*-- but my *vision,* ***Xilo's*** processing power and ***Nathan's*** strategic sense create an *unbeatable combination.*

A self-fulfilling prophecy...the most *potent* of possible futures...

I hear you give the order to *destroy* the *artificial sun* at the heart of the sphere--and the ***Moira Lab*** at the heart of that.

A moment's euphoria in *victory...* and then ***darkness.*** No more to see.

The end of a universe.

The future is set.

We will win.

Ironfire-- *telepathic download incoming.* A list of timed *reflex actions,* coded to the fight.

Trust your *instincts,* Jon-- and try to obey them ***without conscious thought.***

On it, X-Man.

I'll bet. "Obey without conscious thought."

Another day at the *office* for ***Jonny Ironfire...***

What...?

Definition of *faith*, some would say.

Don't worry, I'm only a *daydream*. Your mind *wandering* so you do the ***reflex*** thing better--*that's* what you'll remember.

I'm just in your head to *watch the show*--this is shaping up to prove me *right* in all *sorts* of ways.

But ***while I'm here...***

...Any ***regrets*** to share? Anything you'd do *differently*, if you could?

...The ***Genesis War.***

I made a *mistake*--took a life that haunts me still.

My ***faith...*** it's a ***penance.***

Because I didn't have faith ***then.***

I didn't trust the Storm.

But as long as Ororo's *with* us--***leading*** us--there's ***nothing*** we can't do.

You want *proof*, ghost?

Look around you.

Our troops can't *draw a bead!* How are they this *lucky?*

Not *luck.* This...is *Destiny.*

I expected more foresight, Irene.

Think *ahead.* What's their *goal?* My Death Sphere is *impregnable,* unless *I myself--*

No! The hatch!

The fighter-ejection hatch!

The last fighters are leaving the Sphere *now,* Overlord!

You said "all of them"--

I know what I said! Close it, you over-literal oaf!

"Now! Before they--"

Storm to all hands. **Perfect execution,** everyone.

We're *in*--and Orbis' *defense forces* are **out.** No one here but the *Progenitors*--and before *they* can be re-tasked from their labors...

Noh?

Black Hole Torpedo is locked on the Center-Sun, Storm.

Say the word-- **and we all go together.**

...

Do it.

Until *next time,* my love...

Painless, I hope?

Had to be. If she'd had even an *instant* to form a thought, she'd have sent it *back* to herself. Instead--***darkness,*** as prophesied.

The end of a universe-- her own.

Though I wouldn't put it past Irene Adler to form a *contingency plan...*

Storm? Are you there? I lost signal for a second--

I cut off contact on my end. You've *played your part,* Noh-- ***disarm the torpedo.***

DISARMED

I don't get it. We got here and we're ***not*** blowing up the Moiras?

If Destiny was right--this reality is ***hell,*** Ororo--

A hell that still supports *life*--and thus, supports ***hope.***

Ninety years ago, I was ***angry.*** I still *am*--but how many have lived and died *since* then? One dead planet does not justify a ***murdered universe.***

The Moira Lab is an abomination-- one we must ***defuse,*** not simply destroy. And if we *cannot,* we must ***guard it with our lives...***

...for we guard the life of ***everything that is.***

I'd love to know how to *achieve* that, Ororo-- considering we just lost our *window* on the ***enemy tactics.***

As soon as they get that *hatch* back open, we're ***quite literally*** fish in a barrel...

No. We're fish in an *ocean*-- and I've sailed this ocean before.

Khora?

Destiny didn't get all the fire I have to give. But *you* will.

To be an *Omega-level mutant* is to be *without limit*...but there are limits *beyond* limits. ***Powers beyond powers*** that I am *also* heir to--

--for they do not call me "*the Old Witch*" without ***cause.***

My mother was a sorceress from a sorcerous line-- ***her blood is in me!*** And in *her name* and *those before,* ***I call!***

In ***Ashake's*** name--in ***Ayesha's*** name--***I call you,*** *Amun of the invisible!* ***I call you,*** *Hauhet who rules space!*

I offer you ***fire!*** *And a* ***life incarnate!*** That through ***magic*** and ***mutation*** I might command *the weather of the cosmos itself--* ***and summon a storm to shake realities!***

In Ororo's name...

...LET THE WORMHOLE OPEN!

Accuser to all points--hold on! The whole system's being sucked in-- and us with it!

This was the real plan?

To save the whole damned universe and get away without a scratch?

How could it not be, oh ye of little faith? Trust the Storm--and get ready to ride the lightning!

"...They're gone.

"My Progenitors. My World Farm. All that computational power... data that would take millennia to recalculate and recompile..."

A controlled wormhole just ate them all.

And to add insult to injury--my life's work was destroyed by a BLASTED MAGIC SPELL!

Overlord, surely...surely something can be done...?

...You're right. Something can always be done.

Computer? Switch off life support.

THE FAR EDGES OF THE UNIVERSE.

They won't find us out *here*.

And if they *do* stumble across us--we'll make sure they never stumble *away* again.

What about the ***Progenitors?***

That's *your* job--an *electromagnetic pulse* in the right place should wipe their current orders.

Without an *Overlord* to command them, they'll be happy just maintaining their *artificial planets*. I say we leave them *to* it...

...and concentrate on the ***Center-Sun.***

You know... with a little time and effort, this place could be a *fortress*--***Fort Arakko.*** Maybe a *new home* for our scattered people...

Sounds good to *me*--if the ***Goddess*** approves. She's not led us wrong *yet*.

Khora? Is ***Storm*** patched in?

She...she said something about an *offering*. I think she ***knew.***

She *smiled* at me...and then...

What? You're scaring me.

What's going *on*, Khora?

Ororo's dead, Jon.

We're on our own.

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1 Variant by Ernanda Souza

The Song of the End

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Sing to me, oh poets, your final song. - The song of the end.

Sing as Great Lodus sang, - in days of old - before the Diamond.

Sing in the ways of old-r, the song-patterns of a world long lost.

Sing of the Brotherhood - and Ororo who returned to them.

Sing me the last castle and its last stand.

Sing me the Storm System...

((...and the king who ruled there, last of his line, **Jon Ironfire** his name.))

"The Storm System."

How many still know what that *means?* What **Arakko** once meant--what it's come to mean *again?* A land under *siege?*

The **Queen in Red** is coming to *break* us--and we're not ready. After the *Diamond Jubilee* disaster, we're a **shadow** of our former strength.

Yet if we fall, *all that is* falls with us. We need *hope*...a **symbol**...

Someone once asked me my deepest *regret.*

I said I should have trusted the **Storm.**

Can I trust her *now,* Khora?

***Khora,** the midnight's heir whose heart still burned nine hundred years on.*

Come on, Jon. We both know *that's* not the question.

Because it's not *her* you have to worry about *trusting*...

...

NO.

It's not.

I wish *X-Man* hadn't fallen to the *Orphan-Madrox.* We could do with his *counsel...*

He'd tell you the same thing. You're putting your faith in the *Devil himself --the Father of all Sinisters--*

--to give you back a North Star you've long learned to navigate *without.*

It's *folly,* Jon-- and it's against our *oldest* ways. Even out here, at the edge of everything...we are *of Arakko.*

We're not afraid of a life that *ends.*

Maybe we *should* have been...

...when it was *her* life that ended.

Anyway. We're *committed* now...

"Or we *should* be!"

NO? Not going with the *pun?*

I miss puns.

All right, then, *Jon Ironfire,* ***Last Regent of Arakko...***

...shall we see what your ***New Five*** can *do?*

And in Sinister's smirk was a warning of evil to come.

[09_sins_of___X]
[09_sinister__X]

THE LAST STAND

For one thousand years the galaxy has been rotting from the inside out due to the machinations of Mister Sinister -- machinations he lost control of long ago. To this end, he is on a mission to locate his stolen clones of Moira MacTaggart with which he can reboot the timeline back to the start of that millennium and do things over again.

The clones were stolen from him long ago by his sometime rival Destiny in alliance with Storm and the Brotherhood of Mutants. Though Destiny betrayed her allies, Storm eventually got the best of her, regaining control of the Moira Clones and vowing to stop them from ever being found and used to reset the universe. Storm refused to sacrifice the decades of life the universe had experienced. Unfortunately, in securing its safety, she sacrificed her life.

Now, centuries later, Sinister has found the Moiras protected by the Brotherhood and their leader, Storm's former right hand man, Jon Ironfire. Unfortunately, the legions of Sinisterized Emma Frost have followed him to them and are about to attack.

[KHORA]

[IRONFIRE]

[MISTER SINISTER]

[EMMA FROST]

And evil was coming. Light-years distant but closing in fast.

The **Red Diamond Empire** - under their liege, their ice-hearted Queen.

Winter's unending frost red as old blood-r, **Emma Sinister.**

At the far fringes of ~ Arakko space, the watchmen spied her.

And she spied them in turn, psychic clone-brains seeking out their souls-r,

Guidance for her missiles.

No warning sent.

The King unaware.

In the New Five's chamber, the ritual began in earnest.

Begin.

Sinister's last treasure— a single vial of Hope's precious blood.

Stolen from Exodites, it would unlock true resurrection.

He injected it, with his prize helix into Old Oda's egg.

She ached with pride, her gift, once a food source, now the source of faith.

Craana the Commander gave her order to live and bear life.

Bloodroot the Bone-Shaper formed veins and limbs, a sculptor of flesh...

While Genas Mind-Flayer tore memories from the king himself

Of his Goddess of old, whose wisdom led the first Brotherhood.

And Khora bathed them all in her heart's fire, creating union...

(...returning her to life.)

Risen anew.
Reborn among them.

The great leader of old
returned at last
to fight the last foe.

Ironfire's face knew tears then,
where none had been
in centuries past.

And he whispered her name
in reverence.

Ororo.

The
Storm...

Ororo.

Is that who I am?

It *was*-- in your last life.

I hope it will be *again*.

It's a good sound. I like it.

And it's good to meet you *too*, little cloud.

It's good to meet *all of you*.

I never thought I'd say this to a *Sinister*... but *thank you*.

Just luck that I was saving that DNA sample for a *rainy day*--or a day I *needed* some rain.

Just remember--she has the *knowledge* you supplied, but no *memories*. The Storm *you* knew remains dead, alas.

But if you're feeling *that* grateful, we *could* discuss what you could do for--

ALARM! ENEMY OF ARAKKO SIGHTED! ALARM!

It'll have to wait.

Brotherhood-- to arms.

ALL SERVE
THE RED DIAMOND QUEEN

CHIMERAE HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED

DESIGNATE IV-033 / CODENAME "HIGH SUMMERS"

/// S. SUMMERS ///	"CYCLOPS" ///	FORCE PROJECTION
/// A. SUMMERS ///	"HAVOK" ///	ENERGY PROJECTION
/// G. SUMMERS ///	"VULCAN" ///	ENERGY CONTROL
/// A. ABDOL ///	"LIVING MONOLITH" ///	ENERGY ABSORPTION, HEIGHT MULTIPLICATION

CIRCUIT CAPABILITY: PERPETUAL ENERGY LOOP, SIEGE TOWER

DESIGNATE IV-068 / CODENAME "LOUD HAILER"

/// L. LOGOS ///	"LODUS LOGOS" ///	METALLIC VOICE
/// T. CASSIDY ///	"SIRYN" ///	VOCAL PROJECTION
/// J. CABGILL ///	"FRENZY" ///	STRENGTH, SPEED, DURABILITY
/// M. STONE ///	"RANDOM" ///	MALLEABLE BODY, COUNTER-ADAPTATION

CIRCUIT CAPABILITY: EXTREME FIREPOWER CAPABILITY, SHIELD WALL

DESIGNATE IV-077 / CODENAME "HOT CLAW"

/// M. CALLASANTOS ///	"FERAL" ///	FELINE PHYSIOGNOMY
/// L. CALLASANTOS ///	"THORNN" ///	FELINE PHYSIOGNOMY
/// C. KINCAID ///	"MERCURY" ///	LIQUID METALLIC FORM
/// P. WISDOM ///	"WISDOM" ///	THERMIC DIGITAL PROJECTION

CIRCUIT CAPABILITY: UNSTOPPABLE CLOSE-QUARTER ATTACK

DESIGNATE IV-128 / CODENAME "SAGE ADVISOR"

/// NAME UNKNOWN ///	"SAGE" ///	MENTAL COMPUTATION
/// B. BRADDOCK ///	"CAPTAIN BRITAIN" ///	TELEPATHY, TELEKINESIS
/// A. MADDICKS ///	"ARTIE" ///	IMAGE PROJECTION
/// J. MADROX ///	"MULTIPLE MANN" ///	SELF-REPLICATION

CIRCUIT CAPABILITY: INFINITE INFORMATION PROCESSING, COMMUNICATION

EMMA // LOVES // YOU
SUBMIT // TO // EMMA

Alarms sounded at last as the **Blood Queen** came with her **vanguard.**

The **High Summers** bestowed their cosmic death on the brave sentries.

The **Loud Hailers** bellowed their metal rain from behind their shields.

Leaping out between them, savage **Hot Claws** raked the survivors...

And survivors were few...

((...though the **Red Queen** would have it be none.))

I wanted to have this all wrapped up before ***Beast*** arrived with the rest of the fleet. And *so far,* darlings, you're *all* behind my schedule.

So I'm taking it into my own hands. Convey my disappointment to the ***sub-alterns***-- there will be *no treats.*

Yes, Headmistress.

Heh. Quite *literally* "Head Mistress" in a moment...

Ma'am?

Oh, nothing. Long ago, a fool who thought himself *clever* infected me with a love of ***puns.***

He gave me his *wit,* I gave him my ***whip***--and he ran to the stars like the mucky pup he is.

Mmm. A luxurious driving seat, I must say.

The gravity will *maintain* itself? The bathwater won't slosh?

No, Ma'am.

Then let's not waste another second. *Die for me,* darling--I can take it from here.

A shame *Henry* couldn't forge a more *desirable* chassis... but then, there's a certain beauty in co-opting an *old nightmare,* isn't there?

Connecting to *overbody* via *diamond synaptic fluid.*

Full *consciousness merge* in *three...*

Two...

One...

Zero.

Mistress Mold *engage.*

There is no sound in space yet all the same, we heard her laughter.

A new gravity's pull as she emerged, a death butterfly.

The Blood Diamond Monarch come to grind all under a robot heel.

Hello, darlings.

Auntie Emma's come to punish you.

...Ororo protect us.

I heard that.

You've broken my first commandment.

Praying to another goddess?

Naughty boys...

Thus fell the flaming spires and the heroes who would defend them.

And the Queen of Blood's blow echoed throughout a sun under siege...

Sun-quake!

The battle out there--it's affecting the integrity of the Centre-Sun itself!

We must reach the surface. This...this is too enclosed.

The sky, the stars...I can hear their pain...

Counter-point--wouldn't it be better to head to the center of your Centre-Sun?

If, say, there was an impregnable vault you were guarding--

NO.

We owe you, Sinister--but the vault at the heart of Arakko is not to be touched. Death's door will never be opened.

None of us have ever seen inside--though our psychics dream of bones... and sulfurous incense...

Whatever, you metal-veined hippy--I've got other friends. Look! There's one now!

Doombot! Where's Moira?

D-d-doom knows all. KRAZZTT All arts. All s-s-sciences. All secrets...

"I don't know" would have been fine, you metal monologist.

Un-Unhand me.

As you wish...

KRAKKA

There! You're unhanded.

And now I have a gun...

I see Emma's got herself a body that finally fits her *ego.*

A *robot* body. A diamond *Sentinel.* Oh, *Emma.*

If you'd only asked, I'd have grown you the body of Scott Summers' nightmares...

Don't know who *that* is--but we've faced worse than *this--and will again.*

I'm born to *battle,* it seems. And I have *your knowledge* of what I can do--but not how I *did* it...

When all hope died, you *fought on!* That's who you *are!*

Trust your instincts! Trust the Storm!

My instincts are good. *Experience* would be better.

Then maybe I can offer *mine.*

If you'll pardon the *imposition,* there's a trick we've done *before...*

...that I'd like to do again.

Drink deep.

Once more, the burning heart gave of herself all that she could give,

That the greatest of all might rise anew...

((...and soar to new heights.))

For nine long centuries had Khora's power matured in her heart.

Nine hundred years waiting for the moment to give all once more.

And did that cosmic fire hold faint traces of a soul thought lost?

((Ororo's spirit sang. She drew a cloak of air around her...))

((...and as war raged, she rose to fight alone what could not be fought...))

((4..while her loyal **Brotherhood** held fast against a sinister tide.

We're *surrounded*-- and I'm drained. I can barely lift my *blade*...

I brought my own.

The enemy are *psi-proofed* against me--but I command more than the *living*...

Floor below us-- rise and fight!

RRROAAARGHH!

And there's more where *he* came from! I'll make this whole *sun* a weapon--

Craana-- your flank!

Craana! Genas! **NO!**

Diamond-headed butchers!

My *fire* may be dead--

--but I'll see you burn in the lowest hell!

Khora! Arakko's blade! Midnight's daughter! Sing, scribes, if you can!

Sing of the stand she made as all was lost! As Arakko died!

Ironfire opened his veins, and iron carved iron as the Hot Claws fell!

Bloodroot made red poems of the bodies of the enemy!

And Sinister let fly a cannonade from the Doombot's claw!

BZAM

BZAM

But the chimeric force was without end and would not retreat.

Wounded bad--trying to heal--won't make it.

Don't give up! Ironfire can shield you long enough to--

Oh.

Goodbye, Jon.

KHORA!

Still, the brotherhood fought, though their endgame was set in diamond...

((...barring a miracle.))

Darling. How wonderful to see you again--as a newborn, far out of your depth.

The old Storm might have worried me--the stubborn old buzzard who led the Rebellion against us. She was a threat. But you?

A spark of raw power without knowledge. You haven't learned how to fight yet--never mind how to win...

I haven't learned how to *lose.*

I have not learned *limits* or *boundaries* or *rules*...or *fear.*

All I know is the play of the *living sky.* The *wind*...the *seasons*...

...the *lightning.*

((And Ororo readied for the end...))

((...and called the lightning home.))

Raw electrons transferred through her sky-r,

(-all torn directly from the covalent bonds connecting **atoms.**

The carbon molecules bonding to form the Frost-hearted Queen-r,

(-shattered into fragments in that moment-- with **nuclear force.**)

So that for one instant, a red sun rose in the Storm System-r,

(-and shone its baleful light-r, glowing with **death--**, upon **Ororo.**)

The enemy collapsed; psychic strings cut-- though their ends spared few...

...and Storm not among them.

Ororo...!

D-didn't block the radiation.

Experience... you see?

Maybe next time.

Will... will Arakko *live...?*

Red Diamond *reinforcements* will come--the ***Beast,*** most likely.

But we have a chance now. The ***universe*** has a chance...

That's good. To *live...* is good.

But I'm not *afraid...* of a life... that...

The fight was won and the end had come...

Funny thing.

I'm not afraid either.

24

Sing to me, oh poets,
your final song.

The song of the end...

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #2 Variant

by Pablo Villalobos & Jesus Aburtov

A Storm on the Horizon

26

Once, this was *dead Mars.*

Then the mutants of Krakoa gave it *new life*-- and a *new name*--

--Planet Arakko.

Home to the ***Arakkii***-- an ancient *mutant nation* still recovering from an *other-dimensional war* that lasted *millennia*--

--and to anyone who'd stand *with* us.

*This is **Craig Marshall.***

So, *uh*...are *you* Arakkii?

French-Krakoan. Though I do recommend the *local* cuisine.

Simple ingredients, whatever is to hand-- a war footing. But the ***spices!*** Oh, *monsieur!*

Oh yeah. I know all about the Arakkii...

...spice...

He's a *NASA astronaut.* He has a doctorate in *astrophysics* and another in *soil and crop sciences.* He's made the cover of *NOW* magazine twice.

He may be the most *ordinary* man I've ever been on a date with.

I don't think that will be a problem.

Hello, Craig.

Sorry to keep you *waiting.*

You look... ***beyond words,*** Ororo.

And suddenly, I feel very *under-dressed...*

Don't worry. The last person I had dinner with was ***Doctor Doom*** -- he didn't even take his *faceplate* off.

You're a *vast* improvement.

Oh?

So is this a strictly *diplomatic* dinner?

Oof. That ***smile.***

When was the last time someone actually *flirted* with me?

When was the last time I flirted *back?*

Let's just say I'm a firm believer in *human-mutant relations...*

Ahem-- *un amuse-bouche.*

A shot of chilled Krakoan *gazpacho* over *caviar* from Sobunar's ocean...

Thank you, Saucier.

For saving me from that *line.* ***Kurt*** would have blushed.

Mmm. You know, I've had dinner at the *White House,* and...this is something *else.*

Saucier always surprises.

How are the ***children?***

Meaning the mutant children Craig was willing to give his *life* for during the ***Uranos*** attack. Without a *second's thought...*

Kobb still won't talk--but he *smiles.* And ***Loolo's*** doing great.

Losing her whole *commune...* I kind of expected her to *tough it out,* you know?

But the folks at the *Argyre* community who took us *in*...they really encouraged her to talk *through* it. It's helped her a lot.

Fisher's way. You can't heal if you don't say the pain *aloud.*

I guess I wasn't expecting that. I've still got a lot to *learn* about Arakko.

Then again, I got my briefing from ***Commander Brand,*** and she wasn't exactly painting the best picture. What happened to *her?*

Gone. No one knows where.

If she surfaces again, she'll face *our* justice. If she's *lucky,* ***Nova*** will find her first--she's broken the *Pan-Worlds Treaty* a dozen ways.

I was always a ***Night Thrasher*** fan myself. And a ***Storm*** fan, of course...

Of course.

Seriously-- I always thought you got a *raw deal* in the press.

When Krakoa was *founded,* I guess I was hoping it'd shine a light on the *good* the X-Men had done for the world.

That maybe a new setting would help people see the *real* you...

Well, we're certainly in a new setting *now,* Craig.

What does the *real me* look like to *you?*

For *real?*

You look--

Ororo!

I'm afraid I need you to cut your *meeting* short and join me on Krakoa *at once.*

We need to talk about Erik.

When I was young, ***Charles Xavier*** inserted himself into my life to tell me what I was *not.* And for years after, I followed *his dream.*

Now he summons me *again*--his ***soldier***--as if *nothing has changed* in all the years since.

But too much has.

You'll have to tell me on the *second* date.

Yes, Charles.

...

I'm sorry, Craig.

We need to talk.

X-MEN RED

A CONVERSATION LONG DUE.

Mutantkind is in peril. Magneto is dead. Sinister's backdoor infiltration into the resurrection process has compromised several key members of the Quiet Council. And most recently, information discovered about a collapsed timeline under Sinister's influence has exposed potential weaknesses in the mutant nation's foundation and governance.*

Now, with Krakoa and Arakko alike facing growing pressure from both external and eternal threats, the future of mutantkind has never been more unclear.

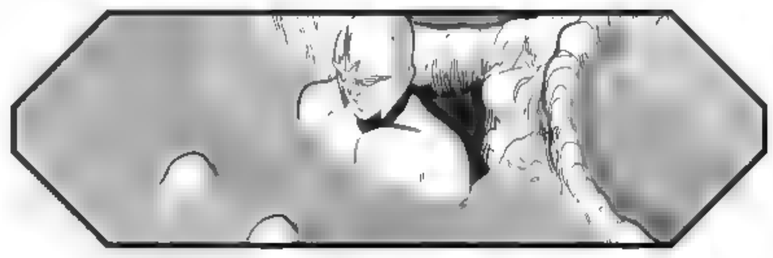
*See SINS OF SINISTER.

[STORM]

[SUNSPOT]

[KOBAK NEVERHELD]

[XAVIER]



[NOVA]

SOUTHERN ARAKKO PRIME.

So, how do you think it's *going?*

Not great.

The Proscenium is *gone--**destroyed.*** *Pete* and *Gamora* are dealing with that--and I try not to *worry,* but Glorp knows where they even *are--**

--and ***I'm*** keeping an eye on all the fires back *home.* Rebel *Skrulls,* rogue *Brood*...the *Alliance* and the *Shi'ar* still ready to draw down at a moment's notice...

...and my ***Nova-sense*** is still tingling about *this* place. With no Proscenium, the ***Lake Hellas Diplomatic Zone*** is the biggest interstellar forum *going.*

Which makes Arakko a *big target* for ***somebody*** out there...

*Check out the new *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY* series for more! --JDW

But--my therapist said he'd *quit* unless I took *six hours off* each and every week.

So here I am, *hot-tubbing while the galaxy burns...*

Wise. A warrior who cannot *rest* can only ***die,*** Richard Rider.

Excellent point, Kobak-- but I was talking about Storm's **date.**

Much as I'm a *huge fan* of our resident *Galactic Supercop...*

I'm not a *cop,* exactly--

--wait, does the ***Hague*** have cops?

I mean, my beat is *planet-level emergencies* and *mass sentient-rights violations.* I'm not arresting shoplifters at the space mall.

And at least I'm not some *narcissistic billionaire* in a ***fancy suit...***

How dare you. I'm *completely naked,* unlike *some* I could mention...

Nova Force overload. I need to keep *something* on or my cells start degrading.

A likely story.

I'll show you how a *Da Costa* responds to an *insult,* Rider.

The game is ***soccer--New Mutants*** versus *New Warriors.* We'll have you crying for your mothers by halftime.

Make it ***basketball*** and you're *on,* rich kid.

Hey, speaking *of*--did I hear ***Firestar*** was on Krakoa now...?

Apologies, my friends. The sun sinks *low--*

--and I am due to battle ***Calderak*** in the Circle Perilous, in final conflict for the *Seat of Victory.*

I have no plans to *yield.* When you see me *again,* either I will have earned my place on the ***Great Ring***--or I will be *dead.*

Do not wish me *luck*-- for I will prevail by my *spines* and my *strength* or not at all.

But if I do not return... ***remember me,*** my friends.

Shouldn't be a problem.

Assuming they don't kill *each other*...how many seats is that now?

Almost a *full house.*

Under the ***Law of Logos,*** there are preliminary events before *battle in the Circle*-- tests of fitness for the *role.*

The new ***Seat of Dreams*** is at that stage--but the Seat of ***Stalemate*** was decided yesterday.

Have you met ***Lycaon*** yet?

Can't say I have...

They're a little more *imposing* than poor ***Idyll*** was. Imagine an *Omega Wolverine.*

And then *double it--*

CHROOOMM

What the--?

What the hell is *that...?*

We're close to the *External Gate*--the one that was originally in ***Otherworld.*** It moved to *Arakko* when the Arakkii came through to *our* reality--then it moved *here.*

A flare like *that*...something's come through it. Something *big.*

Or *someone.*

Suit up, Nova.

"This could become *apocalyptic.*"

Charles.

Ororo.

I apologize if I called you away from anything *important...*

It depends how you *define* the word. I was taking a little time for myself-- *a commodity in short supply.*

But nothing as ***important*** as, say, *nurturing the crops* of the people who gave me a *home* and *support* when I had *neither.*

Had you called me away from *that* work, Charles...

...we might have a problem.

The world I offer is not **beautiful**--but it is **real**--far more real than the **fantasy** you're living **now.**

You are no **goddess,** Ororo. You are a **mutant**--and you have **responsibilities.**

...

You still *resent* me coming to you as I did? All those *years* ago?

You told me I lived in *fantasy.* I was young enough to believe it.

To believe that *helping my people survive* was worth *less* than helping ***you...***

And was I *wrong?* How many times have you ***saved the world,*** Ororo?

How often have the X-Men saved the *universe* only because ***you were there?***

The greatest good for the greatest number. Life as *mathematics.*

As if there is no ***mathematician*** deciding who plays the *remainder* in their cold equations...

My hand was *forced.* My X-Men were *dying,* Ororo!

My ***children***-- and ***I was alone!*** I didn't even have ***Erik*** to turn to--

Max.

His name was ***Max.***

...

Of course. I'm sorry.

I know he went back to his *birth name*, but... *Erik Lehnsherr*... ***Magnus***...

...he was my oldest friend, who I knew as well as I know myself.

But I never knew Max.

He never *let* me.

"And I suppose that's why I *asked* you here. Now...I *have* to know.

"When Magnus *died*, I was engaged in *psychic warfare* on a scale you cannot imagine. I ***felt*** him die...but I had no time for the *fine details*.

"Or so I told myself. The truth was, I *flinched*. I could not *look* at it.

"I didn't have the strength."

But now...now I am *sole captain* of the *ship of state*.

And this business with ***Sinister***...how he *infected* me with his psyche...

I must *know*, Ororo.

What did *he* know? *When did he know it?*

What were Magneto's last words?

...

They were *private*.

Not from *me.*

From *you*, most of all.

This talk of being "*sole captain*"... like a ***king on a throne,*** as if the Quiet Council are merely *courtiers* to be summoned--

So Magnus *did* sense something? He *saw* Sinister in me *when he left the Council?*

Charles... I understand how you ***feel--***

The *blazes* you do!

He was my oldest friend! He died in your arms!

I have a right to know what he said to you, and I am not ASKING, Ororo!

I am *no longer an X-Man--* and *you* no longer lead them.

I ***respect your grief,*** Charles. But I *must ask*--in what capacity do *you* presume to order *me?*

You know I can simply *read your surface memories?*

You wouldn't even feel it.

By all means, Charles...

...try.

LISTEN TO ME, MY X-MEN! UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE I SHALL GIVE THE ORDERS... HERE AND IN THE FIELD!

GIVE YOUR ORDERS THEN, AND SEE WHO FOLLOWS THEM! I WILL GO MY OWN WAY!

...OBEY--...THOUT HESITATION!

ARE ORDERS PROFESSOR X!!

THOSE ARE THE ORDERS OF PROFESSOR X!!

THOSE ARE THE ORDERS OF PROFESSOR X!!

...OSE ARE THE ORDERS OF PROFESSOR X!!

NO, YOU WILL NOT! YOU, AND THE REST OF MY X-MEN, WILL OBEY--WITHOUT HESITATION!

AS LOATHE AS I AM TO TAMPER WITH OTHERS' MINDS I WILL NOT TOLERATE INSUBORDINATION, MUTINY... OR DESERTION!

I WILL NOT LET YOU LEAVE ME.

DESERTED. I STOPPED HER WITH TELEFORCE BOLT.

FOR ALL YOUR POSTURING, YOU ARE STILL NO MORE THAN A MAN.

I AM A GODDESS!

OUR DUEL IS OVER

AAHHH!!

You... you repelled my psychic probe...

As you yourself *taught* me to--as you taught ***all of us.*** Your "*Red Triangle*" *psychic defense protocol.*

To be called on if we ever had to face a telepath with *evil intentions...*

...or one who had ***lost control.***

What's *happening* to you, Charles?

...

I'm afraid.

Sinister... he didn't *claim* you. You can't know what it was *like*.

He didn't *control* me, he *was* me. Have I *truly* purged him? I *thought* I had... but ***now...***

Was the *Council Massacre* when he introduced his strain to us?* Or was that a decoy?

A way to disguise the *real* starting point?

*See Immortal X-Men #9-10! --JDW

"It's not *what* he did that haunts me, Ororo, it's *when*. Because *before* Krakoa--before *any of this*--***we*** came to ***him***.

"Resurrection is based on *his genetic database*. His *evil* is the foundation of our *greatest good*.

"If our Eden has a *serpent*, it wears a ***diamond on its head.***"

Or a *club* or a *spade* or a *heart*. Either way, we are *surrounded by enemies--**within and without.***

Those who hate us for our *successes* as a mutant nation...

...and those who hate us for where we have ***failed.***

Moira lost her faith and turned *against* us.

Max lost his and turned *away.*

If I lose *my* faith...***can our nation survive?***

Already, there are so many *cracks* in the bedrock. And I'm not a ***fool,*** Ororo.

I know that things are being ***kept*** from me.

"And I've *allowed* it. I've spent my *whole life* closing my eyes to what I could so *easily* pry into.

"But if I had looked into ***Sinister's*** mind, forced his secrets from him--how much *pain* would it have spared the universe?

"*Multiple timelines,* Ororo. ***Trilllions of lives,*** created and destroyed...and I could have *stopped it.*

"I could have ransacked his mind *at any time...*"

That's how *he* used my power, of course--to *violate private thoughts.* To ***control.***

Yet how many times have ***I*** crossed that same line? Just now, in my anger, I attempted it *again.*

So am I *him?* Is that *me?* What is the *difference?*

The luxury of my ***guilt?***

And when paradise is *lost* for that guilt. Because when action was *needed...* I *hesitated.*

What excuse will I give then?

...

Max *was* thinking of you as he died, if that's what you want to know.

He asked me to *watch* you.

So he *did* suspect--

Not because he thought you might be *sinister.*

Because you might be you.

Of the three who shared the dream of Krakoa, you are the *last.*

And rather than *allowing* your dream to pass to *other hands,* you are trying to bear its weight ***alone--***

--though it is ***crushing*** ***you.***

I'd like to think that a measure of *concern* lay at the root of Max's request, Charles. He ***was*** your friend.

But after *today?*

I am not.

Don't take the gate to Arakko again.

THE EXTERNAL GATE OF ARAKKO.

...

That doesn't look like a gate to *me*.

Looks like ***trouble.*** Let me give it a *gravimetric scan--*

Blue blazes.

See, when you say "*Glorp*" or "*d'ast*," I know it's *bad*, but when you say "***blue blazes***"...

...It's ***real*** bad.

These *readings*...it's like something's *cutting through space.*

Carving a path between ***realities***--closer to us with every swing.

Who has *that* kind of power?

Who...or *what.*

Otherworld has weapons we ***can't imagine...***

It's *flaring!*

Get behind me--

Unnhh...

You...are of Arakko?

Men of fire and stars... but men at leisure...?

Oh, I think break time is over.

Is that what I *think* it is?

The **White Sword** has *fallen*, and 99 of his champions with him. *I am the last.*

I bring you his legendary weapon *Purity*, as proof of his **last words.**

"*Tell them*," he said. "*Tell them all...*

"...Genesis is coming."

X-Men Red #11 Variant by Ejiwa “Edge” Ebenebe

Storm Warning

27

THEN.

AMENTH.
THE IVORY SPIRE.

CASTLE OF THE WHITE SWORD
AND HIS HUNDRED WARRIORS.

Genesis is coming.

And not as she has come before.

In times past, she came in the name of ***Arakko***-- that held the rear and fought our *leavings.*

Centuries late, she arrived--with her great *armies,* resplendent in their *arrogance...*

...and my Hundred showed those honored guests our ***most gracious hospitality***--handing out steaming cups of ***their own traitorous blood.***

"And when she came *again*--in thrall to the ***Daemon-Helm,*** backed by the daemon hordes--***the result was the same.***

"But the helm is now the *staff...*"

...and the staff is not the helm.

Saturnyne plays her games on *many levels*--and *petty vengeance* is one of them. Any gift she gives has a *curse* upon it.

And in *Genesis'* hands...***the curse has come for us.***

It still seems *impossible*, General.

Possession is one thing--but to think that one born of Okkara would *choose* to ally with *Annih*--

No.

Do not say the *word.*

Do not say the ***name.***

"The staff is not the helm. The power it holds is *insidious*--and its reach is *long.*

"It whispers and tempts. And given license, it ***claims.***

"To speak its name, with it so *close* to us, could give it claim on your ***own*** soul..."

Ha!

Not *my* soul, General.

Even *yours,* my oldest friend--though it's been pledged to me for millennia.

Though you were *first to fall*...***and first to rise...***

...Jon Ironfire.

My life came *from* you. My life is *for* you.

Say the word and I'll spend it *again*-- *cleaving that stick of gold in two.*

You've died for me too often to count, Jon. I ask *more* of you now.

I ask you to survive.

Take the sword. Bring word to *Arakko.*

Tell them all-- but especially the ***Seat of Loss...***

No! Don't ask what I cannot give, General! ***I will not leave you!***

*All of your battles are **mine to fight**--*

Not anymore.

I RELEASE YOU FROM YOUR OBLIGATION.

Oh.

I...

It's...

...it's like waking from a ***dream.***

You got *old,* Blue.

I have, have I? Well, now *you* get to see what that's like, my friend.

I've kept you alive as long as I *could*--but once I break my hold, it stays broken. No more healing at my hand... and if you die *again*...

General!

What news, Kanyia? Have you sighted her *army?*

No! ***No!*** We saw them not--***until they dropped their cloak!***

Genesis is not coming, General--

"--GENESIS IS HERE!"

Blades to the front! Shield the artillery!

We'll spill a moat of blood before they take these walls!

They *hid* from us! *Snuck* up on us like thieves!

Why such base tactics *now?* After centuries...?

I fear I know, Anika.

Before, we were an obstacle.

Now we are the prize.

AAAAHH!

A Summoner dead. I *mislike* that.

Who shall answer, brothers and sister?

Whose turn is it now?

You will have a *hundred feasts,* brother--each one ***ever-replenishing,*** once Mother's work is done.

The ***hunger*** is upon me...

When will that be? The Spire is all but ***impregnable***--*and I am not disposed to wait.*

Then let me speed your way...

...an arrow for an arrow.

AARRHH!

Tarius...?

The...the *contagion...*

...it spreadsss...so q-quickly...

...sssee for yourssselfff.

Plague! Plague-weapons in the ranks!

Get the General! He gives life to us all--

NO!

You fool!

He stays inside! Protected by the Spire!

If the enemy reaches him, *all is lost*--

Not *all*, Captains.

Honor is not lost.

As it *would* be--if I let my *troops* suffer agonies for my *own* comfort.

General, *no!* Please, I *beg* of you...

I hear you, Rukos. And you've served me *well*--so I won't strike your two heads off for showing *fear*.

Let me *see* this contagion...

The plague of ***black ichors.*** A disease of Pestilence's own design.

It spreads with a *touch*...

HHSSSS...

...but *my* touch is stronger.

SSS!

BE HEALED.

So. The *General in Ivory* comes to the battle with ***bare hands.***

Where is your *namesake*, General?

Where is your White Sword?

A question for a question, Genesis.

Where is your husband?

The Traitor Queen shows her face!

Take her down!

You dare?

To fire upon the mistress of all flame? To make war on War?

Learn your lesson.

I ask *again.*

Where is the sword *Purity* that cleaves all in its way? Where is the blade imbued with the *deep magic?*

If you have it, *hold it high.* Even now--with all the power I have in my grip--you'd stand a *chance...*

A chance to what? To *hold you at bay?*

To *hide* in our Spire, forcing *you* to come to *us*-- ***as if we were cowards?***

Oh, Genesis. You *surely* know me better than that by *now.*

I'd never stoop to *your* tactics.

Your *insult* is noted, White *Nothing.*

But if insults are all you *have* now...

...then the time has finally come for you to acknowledge *my rule.* Arakko *calls you,* General.

And I will not take no for an answer.

"And so it was.

"The staff *whispered*... and, after a time, the White Sword *heeded the call.*

"And his Hundred bowed *with* him-- for they were in *his* thrall, as he was now in *hers.*

"All save *one.* The one he loved best.

"The one he *trusted*--with his *life*, his *soul*...

"...and his *sword.*"

NOW.

ARAKKO.
THE RED LAGOON.

TEMPORARY HQ OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF ARAKKO.

"I rode for days.

"Through the blistered wreck of *Dryador* and on to *Blightspoke*."

BACK OFFICE OF ROBERTO DA COSTA.

And *there*-- in that place of chaos where space is *thin* and *vulnerable*-- I held Blue's sword in my hand.

Purity is named so for a *reason*--it is an object reduced to ***pure essence of function.***

A sword that is, itself, ***the act of cutting.***

And with *that* keen edge... I carved a path between *realities.* And came here.

To ***you.***

Hrm.

Beto was right to bring this to the Brotherhood-- and the ***Night Seats.*** But it's bigger than we are.

I'd say it's for the *Great Ring,* Ororo...

Agreed, Fisher King.

We must convene at *once*-- to discuss the threat and *plan our response*--

A *discussion?* Is *that* what I rode through hell for? *There's only* ***one response!***

Gather the troops!

He's not wrong. If we face ***Annihilation***--in *whatever* form-- time is of the essence.

No thrones on Arakko, Khora. No *generals* either.

We're a planet of *survivors* trying to *heal*-- not a hundred soldiers fighting under ***one iron fist...***

What do *you* know of the Hundred, old man? Or of *healing?*

I fell *dead* in our great healer's arms--and I was ***healed*** and ***healed*** and ***healed*** and woke *still young* in a fight *eons old*--to watch it ***lost!*** To watch ***him*** lost!

Where were you?

Not *there*, aye. But ***somewhere.*** And maybe I'll teach you how ***I*** fought.

If you want to test your *fancy weapons* against ***my bare hands--***

That will be ***ENOUGH!***

KKOOOSH!!

We *all* have pain. We all have the right to *speak it aloud* and have it *heard.*

But it ***demeans*** that pain to reduce it to a ***contest.***

I expect better of *you,* Fisher...

He reminds me of ***me.*** Makes it hard to keep a temper.

Watching *him* get ready to make my *old mistakes...*

I... apologize.

Warriors at rest have still known war. ***Everyone*** in this room has been steeped in *despair and death...*

Well... *personally,* I wouldn't say ***steeped...***

You're a *little* steeped, Richard. You've at least been *dunked* once or twice.

Kind of a *death donut.*

A what?

But the fire-hearted one--***Khora?***--she's right. There's ***no time.***

Genesis has the ***Annihilation Staff*** in her hand and *darkness* in her heart, and she is ***coming.*** When she *arrives...*

"...it'll *already* be *too late.*"

ARAKKO PRIME.

There was *no* Krakoan Gate planted here. No life in this soil at all.

The entrails *said* you'd arrive at this place and time. But I wasn't expecting this *method.*

An *evolution* of mutant technology...?

The secrets of the ***Okkara Gate*** are mine to keep.

But it is as you said--*now and when we met last.* The living island Arakko is a *blasted plain,* barely alive and marked with the bones of our ***dead...***

...because ***I*** was not here to prevent it.

And are you *disappointed,* Queen Genesis?

I am *glad.*

It would have been terrible *indeed* if I had done what I have done on the strength of a *lie.* And more terrible for *you...*

I'd still *get what we both* want, your highness.

War.

You think you *want* a war with Arakko? Oh, *Marianna Stern*--that is almost ***precious.***

You have lit a flame that may ***consume this world***--does *Coven Akkaba* believe that fire won't ***spread?***

In *this*, your majesty...Coven Akkaba speaks for **ORCHIS.**

And we're counting on it.

ORCHIS MEMO

FROM THE DESK OF MARIANNA STERN

RE: PROTOCOL ORSON

Is that what we're calling it? I get the reference, but I don't like the idea that this will end up as just a hoax. We've worked too hard, me especially.

To follow up on my previous reports, the fuse is lit, as it were -- Genesis has arrived on Mars. By projecting astrally, I was able to communicate directly without fear of, well, being murdered -- a much easier feat this time than last, and we still need to discuss proper compensation for that. I know you have a scientist's skepticism when it comes to Coven Akkaba's methods, Director, but there are as many risks involved in projecting one's consciousness into the far realms as there are in preparing a gene-targeted pathogen or priming a Sentinel-sized ARC reactor or whatever you did today.

Still, that's a matter for our accountants -- back to the business at hand. I was a little surprised to note that only Genesis arrived at the prophesied hour (and the how of that remains a mystery -- she mentioned an "*Okkara Gate*", and I suggest you put a bio-research team on that possibility as soon as humanly possible.) So far, no sign of Apocalypse or their offspring. I'm not sure what that means, exactly -- perhaps we got lucky and she put a sword through his throat -- but their absence shouldn't affect the overall strategy.

There are two ways I can see the Martian gambit progressing from here. The first is that Genesis finds herself very impressed by Munroe's expert leadership. She completely understands why the living island of Arakko was yanked through space from an Earth it could easily have conquered and then put in a coma by a mad Eternal, and she's completely fine with fully half of the Arakkii population being scattered to the winds of space as mercenary trash when they could be united under her command.

That's one scenario. If it comes to pass, we've at least succeeded in distracting Arakko and Storm with internal politics while we [redacted].

The other scenario, of course, is the one we want.

Because if Genesis isn't impressed, that's a mutant civil war right on our doorstep. And we can do all *sorts* of things with that.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXXVIII

Genesis was not impressed.

X-Men Red #12 Variant by Rian Gonzales

Genesis and Revelations

28

AMENTH.

Tell me what *strength* is.

...
Please. *Please* tell me.
Great Apocalypse...
That is a corrupted name.
Mangled by history.
Once, yes, it pleased me that my name meant *final destruction*... but the time for such blunt concepts has *ended*.
And so, I am...
...a more *ancient* word with more resistant *meaning*.
"Revelation."
For I *am* the Revelator and have *always* been so.
As was *revealed*-- *so I shall reveal.*
Yes. *Please,* Lord.
"The strong will survive." That is the word from on high.
I want to survive. *How do I survive?*
What is strength?

If the strong *survive*...then the *measure* of strength *is survival.*

But *understand:* survival has no *moral* component.

Heroes *die.* Brave hearts *break.* Paradise is *lost.*

The numinous is *denied* by *small souls* or *betrayed* by *despots.*

The *alchemist's gold* is pulled from *heaven*...to make *currency.*

Consider a rock battered by the ocean for a million years. It is *worn*-- but *whole.*

Is a rock *noble?* Can a rock be *moral?*

A rock is *there.*

As I was there.

And *this* is the revelation as it was revealed to *me.*

It is not *enough* only to be *there.*

It is not enough only to be strong.

...

Well, thanks for nothing, big man.

BLURK!

You shouldn't talk to them.

...

You reforged the *family sword*...

Don't change the subject, my love. You've become a *lecturer* on your island of the weak. ***But I still teach by example.***

The strong ***survive.*** Those who ***surrender*** will survive-- ***in my army.*** So what is strength?

Strength is ***surrender to me.***

As it ***always*** was.

My ***heart*** knows it, Genesis.

But a ***world*** is not a lover's heart. I cannot ***support*** this course.

I cannot walk with you.

I have never asked you to, my ***gentle*** one. My mage of ***mercy.***

But you will ***open the way.***

And if I choose *not to?* Your armies will not persuade me.

Nor your *White Sword,* nor his *Hundred,* nor my *own children...*

...nor *anything that you hold.*

THUNK

Then *I* will persuade you.

And if *you* wish to persuade *me...*

...defend your position *well,* my love.

Make your arguments *clean* and *precise.*

For I will not hold back.

THAP

HERALDS OF THE APOCALYPSE

WAR AND PEACE

A millennium ago, Apocalypse ruled over the ancient mutant land, Okkara, along with his wife, Genesis. Together, they defended Okkara and lead the mutants against the Amenthi horde who besieged them. To end that war, Genesis made a deal with the dark elder god of Amenth, Annihilation, donning the Annihilation helm to take control of the horde and ultimately splitting Okkara into two parts: Krakoa and Arakko, and separating Genesis and Apocalypse from one another.

During the Tournament of Swords, Genesis and Apocalypse faced one another again on opposite sides of a battlefield, and Apocalypse was able to remove the Annihilation helm from Genesis, freeing her of its influence and forcing back an encroaching force of Amenthi bent on Krakoa's destruction. Saturnyne was able to convert the Annihilation helm into a staff to limit its corrupting influence over Genesis. In the aftermath of the battle, Genesis demanded that Apocalypse return to Amenth as a show of good faith between Krakoa and Arakko.

But peace can only last for so long -- and the Arakkii are made for war.

[APOCALYPSE]

[ISCA THE UNBEATEN]

[PESTILENCE]

[GENESIS]

[WAR]

[FAMINE]

OKKARA.

In a time long past.

A truly *magnificent* gift, Isca.

I cannot thank you enough.

It comes apart and locks together again so *seamlessly*--and yet the balance is *exquisite*...

Like your new family. *Four* strong children now--and together, *what won't they achieve?*

I challenged the swordmaker *Ingios* to see who could forge the better weapon--so it's *better than the best.*

Though he's not the swordmaker his *mother* was. This won't beat the white sword she made for *his* birth.

Except as an ornament of *exquisite beauty*...

...which is all a sword *should* be--in a time of *peace.*

"Peace."

Peace is not the *natural condition*, my husband.

I am a *living weapon*, and so are you. So is my *sister*. So is *every mutant on Okkara.*

And *all* weapons were made for the *battles* to come.

And if the battle *never* comes, my love?

Can the weapon not become something *more?*

The name of the child will decide the name of the *sword*, sister Genesis.

Have you *decided* yet?

...

Death.

The child's name is *Death.*

Famine.

War.

Pestilence.

And Death.

You don't like the names?

I like them *very much*--as well you know.

You know where I came to Okkara *from.*

A land where *pain* is harnessed to build great *monuments* to the *denial of fate...*

My children are *my* monuments--built from *love,* not pain. *My* denial, in the face of what I am told must be.

Each named for a concept *lost to the past.*

We feed the land, and the land feeds us. Where is there *famine?*

Our healers love and play among their people. Where is there *pestilence?*

Our swords are forged in celebration. Where is there *war?*

Where is there death?

Oh, my poor love. Where is it *always?*

Not forgotten in the past. *Waiting in the future...*

Waiting to strike.

At night, I dream of a sword--one not made for bright days, but to *herald* the *night.*

I dream of it *splitting paradise in two...*

...opening the door to *annihilation.*

And I dream that this is *more* than a dream.

And so, I named our children. Not in denial, but in *recognition*--of what they must *face, overcome* and then *become.*

What they must be strong to *survive*--for *only the strong survive...*

On *that,* we are of one mind, wife.

But can strength never *rest?* Does survival have *no ending?*

Can there be no time of...

Of...

...what is that light?

The New History of Arakiko

Chapter 1

Once I was lost, now I am found, and this is my story.

First there was Okkara, the one land of mutants.

It was ancient before that word existed -- but not yet old, in the way we are now old. Nor would it become so; for the birth of what is now came with the death of what was then.

For on the far side of the sky, in the opposite-lands, there was Amenth, the blood-red world, where the hardiest daemons were separated even from their own kind by gulfs of screaming void — and by their ruler, the cold gold helm Annihilation.

From whence did Annihilation come? From what high darkness, what dread branch of the anti-tree did the golden helm descend? Even now, all we have are whispers. We only know that Annihilation saw the one land... and saw that it could be taken.

That it could be of use.

So Annihilation studied us... and in the sword Purity, that was the very act of cutting, saw the key.

So the Twilight Sword was forged, to tear the way between realities. And it tore the very land asunder, so that what was one became two -- and from the chasm between them, the enemy poured into this world.

The war began with a single scream.

CLANGG

Do you remember how you *screamed,* husband? In that single endless moment when the *Twilight Sword* cleaved the land in two?

I will *never forget...*

Nor will I.

It was not a squeal of *fear.*

Nor a howl of *pain--*

--though their blades bit *deep* as you shielded the children.

It was a scream of *rage* and *despair...*

You remember it *well.*

Rage that paradise had been sundered--and ***despair*** that it would ***always be so.***

That I had been forcibly awoken from a ***beautiful dream***--the dream of ***peace***--and would never know sleep again.

What you heard was the ***burning of my soul.*** And I took that raw flame in my hands...

"...and gifted it to our enemies.

"We fought ***against all hope***--for a day, a month, a year.

"If the boy ***Blue***--his power woken by ***grief,*** his dead father's ***sword*** in his hand--had not raised his Hundred and ***charged*** the rift...we would have ***fallen.***

"As it was, the years passed, and we ***fought on...***"

And my ***sister*** fought by our side--never losing, nor losing heart. Our ***children*** grew to be ***warriors.***

They were years of ***glory,*** husband.

They were.

And do you remember how they ***ended,*** my love?

Of course I do.

We ***won.***

"And the enemy came to us, *begging bowl in hand...* to *parley.*"

I would like to make an offer...

...to you strong mutants of great quality.

So make it.

If only I could simply... *give it to you.* But generosity is nowhere to be found in my nature.

Sincerity, however, is...

...I want you to earn it.

Allow me, my love.

No. *They are mine.*

"I recall the *precision* of your strikes... the subtle *surgery* of your roots and vines as they threaded daemon bones, *feeding on the marrow.*

"I recall a conscious choice *not to blink*-- for *that* is how fast your victory was.

"And I recall the Annihilation helm making its *offer*-- *to you and you alone*--"

--but not *what* it offered. Nor your *answer.*

You kept that to yourself.

The knowledge might have *broken* you, husband. And *then*, I needed you *whole.*

But *now?*

"Perhaps it's time for you to *learn.*"

Genesis of the Broken Land. Hear my words in your mind-- *open yourself to them.*

For I come to you now as a *friend.*

Do you, now?

Do I not?

Have I not made you a *warrior-queen*, when once you were a *paranoid outsider?* Have I not given you the times for which you were *born?*

Have I not reforged your *husband*, back to the *merciless blade* that came to you from the desert lands? Undone the peace that *blunted* his sharp edges?

Have I not built *heroes* from your *children?* A *legend* from your *sister?* A *glorious myth* from your *country?*

Have I not made *all of your dreams come true?*

And at what *cost?*

The weak were *winnowed*, the strong *survived*--and *thrived*. Is this not your *philosophy?*

And so *here* is my offer, Queen of Strength and Glory. For *your ears alone.*

I will *seal* the rift.

If you *ask me to.*

That is all I must do?

Ask?

I require no abasement or humiliation. I do not even need a "please."

Ask-- and the rift is closed.

The war will end here. With nothing further lost...

...nor won.

Only ask.

What of payment for your crimes--

And what of the lost hundred?

What of our dead?

Stop

We both know that there is only one question truly in your heart.

If the war does not end... if the rift remains open...

...can you win?

Peace.

The dream was real.

We had *peace.*

In our hands. *Paid for with blood.*

Okkara... had *peace...*

...and you *refused* it--

I *did.*

And I was *right* to...

SHUCK

...because we were not made for peace.

Hnnnh--

And you *insult* yourself by pretending anything else.

By pretending--with your *great hindsight*--that if it were *you*, you would have taken *another road.*

I *know you better,* husband. And I think *more* of you.

You are of *Arakko*--as I am. And in the *broken land,* we *fight.*

As *you* would have fought.

Yes.

Yes, I would have fought.

For their *crimes,* for our *justice,* I would have fought. *Even knowing I would lose...*I would have fought.

Even knowing the *cost...* Do you *remember,* my love?

What it cost?

The New History of Arakko

Chapter XXIII

What was the cost? The cost was simply this, and this alone: Surrender.

Not to the golden helm — not yet. This was surrender to fate; to what was, and what had to be.

Could there have been reconciliation? Could there have been healing and peace? We will never know. Isca's betrayal, so soon after the parley -- the knowledge that the war as it then was could not be won -- created the necessity of action.

And so, what should never have been cleaved in two was now separated forever.

Husband from wife.

Parent from child.

Arakko from Krakoa.

In time, the final war would be fought and won, in the contest of swords that freed our land from Annihilation for the first time -- forging the golden staff from the golden helm. In time, Genesis would return to Amenth as a conqueror, and tame those lands for her own — and for the staff in her hand.

Those chapters of Arakko's great story I will relate in my own time and at my own pace. But for now, know this:

These two could never truly be one again.

I know, husband. I was there.

And I could ask the same of you.

You sent the broken land to Earth--to coddled Krakoa. Your decision, my love, no other's.

What did you truly intend? For the strong to conquer the weak? For the weak to worship the strong, as we came to them in all our majesty?

You know what I intended. To force growth.

To force a necessary change...

And that was a noble aim, my philosopher.

But remember-- I saw the results.

AMENTH.

In recent times, after the contest of swords, the return to Amenth and the taming of the Summoner-Lands.

We *yield.*

The remaining ***Amenthi Summoners***--and those daemons in our power and not suborned to ***Blightspoke***--are once more in service of ***Genesis...***

...and ***Annihilation.***

Good boy. I ***dislike*** killing Summoners.

Be ***careful,*** my sister. ***Sentimentality*** is a condition ***difficult*** to ***remedy,*** once it takes root in the heart...

And surrender, just like that? No threats or curses spat?

How ***sad,*** old mage. How ***flat.***

When the wind changes, do we *curse the wind?*

Once, the *helm* commanded us...now, the *staff.*

Neither power is to be resisted *long*...hm?

There is no need to resist an *ally,* ancient one.

Nor a *servant*...

Servant

Yes. As *we* now are...your *servants.*

So the wind blows. But *who knows?*

What?

Tarn is *dead?*

Perhaps the outcome would be *different* had *Tarn the Uncaring* lived to see this day--

We felt his passing in our bones. And the *news* of it reached us through our *once-comrades,* toiling in the Blightlands for Saturnyne's coin.

His chosen--*the Locus*--mourn him still, sealed in the *Spire Vile* on the world of Arakko, as they continue his work in his name...

The *world* of Arakko?

Then as we have conquered *Amenth,* mutants have now *conquered the Earth...?*

NO.

A *different* path was taken.

I have watched the Krakoans--*my other children*--in scrying fields and gossamer globes, by the *old magic.*

They could not *join* with Arakko--too long had passed. But together--*entwined in purpose*--there could be *growth.* A *change* to the stagnant status quo.

Old *death...* to *new life.*

I thought we were *one family* again, Father. And yet you keep *secrets...*

So what transpires *now* on this world of Arakko, husband?

Would we *approve?*

...

Our people continue to be *tested--*

He lies.

An *astral spirit*--

Your people are not *being* tested. They have *already* been tested--and they *failed.*

I am *Marianna Stern* of *Coven Akkaba*-- and I expended a great deal of my *magic* to project myself before you, great lady.

I would expend *more*-- to show you the truth your husband *hides*...

Akkaba.

She is of *Orchis*-- old foes in new guises. Attend her words as you would a *serpent's*...

If she has survived so long as *your* old foe, she *should* be attended to--for she has *surely earned* the *right.*

Unless it is an *easy* thing to survive the *wrath* of *En Sabah Nur*...?

It should be *impossible* to confront an *Omega of Arakko* and *survive*-- and yet, *behold.*

Behold the *death of history* and the *defilement* of the *Once-Great Ring.* The end result of the *contamination* brought by your husband's chosen people.

Behold *Uranos.*

"It took an *outsider* to show me the truth you hid.

"What was I to do *then?* What else *could* I have done?

"I *reforged our swords.* I gathered the last of our *children*-- the vampire lands of Sevalith did not wish my son to leave them, but I was *persuasive*--

"--and *then?* With my *family* around me and the daemons of a hundred *Amenthi Summoners* at my back?

"I confronted the only enemy *remaining*-- the *White Sword*--in his ancient Spire. And I *humbled* him and made his Hundred *mine.**

"And while I did *all of these things*-- while I took *necessary action*--what did *you* do, my husband?

"What did you do, besides *prepare for my return?"*

*See X-Men Red #12. --JDW

I chose you long ago. I choose you *still.*

But though you were the *living Apocalypse* to your weak Krakoans...of the two of *us?*

You will *always* be the Mage. *And I will always be the Warrior.*

And so you must *yield.*

Open the way, my husband. I know you *have* that power...

I do, my love. In *that,* you are correct.

But I am *more* than Mage.

I am *mutant...*

...and I come *armed.*

I can control every *atom* of my own body. That is my gift--*my mutant weapon.*

But the true measure of *strength*--to my philosophy--is not the weapons you can *summon...*

...but the pain you can survive!

There you are, husband.

At last...

There I *am*, wife.

But it is not *enough* only to be *there*.

It is not enough only to be *strong*.

So I lay *down* my swords--as I did on the *plains of Otherworld*--to save us all.

I *yield*... on my *own terms*.

THUKK

You have persuaded me. If our *reasons* to act differ, that matters *less* than the *necessity for action.*

Mutantkind will not survive the fire to come without *Arakko*--and Arakko must thus be *tested*... and *tempered in the flame.*

And as you *said,* my love-- *I prepared for your return.*

Millennia of mutant magic, contained in *three seeds...*

...the *okkara gates.*

One, I give to *you,* Genesis--to *use as you will.*

One, I will keep for *myself.*

And one, I plant *here...* in my own *blood.*

Blood is what the seed must *feed* on...

...for mutant blood has *always* been the cost of mutant power.

Thank you, my love.

Will you come *with* me?

No.

As I said--I *cannot* walk this path at your side any more than *you* could keep from walking it.

But there is one thing I ask. If this is *truly* your path...

...walk it alone.

NO.

Goodbye, husband.

Until we *meet again.*

...Is she gone?

Yes.

Okay. I'm getting up.

Good thing I don't keep much *brain* up here. I might keep this *knife* though.

How did I *do*, teacher?

You *survived.*

Join me if you like. I have my *own path* to walk--my own *forces* to gather.

But soon, our destinies will cross *again* on the battlefields of Arakko...*and my love will test me once more...*

You? You're the *Big A*-- top of the alphabet.

You think *you* need testing?

We *all* do, little daemon-- the strong most of all.

For to face the test is to face the *revelation...*

...and the Revelation never ends.

X-Men: Before the Fall — Heralds of Apocalypse #1 Variant

by Leinil Francis Yu & Sunny Gho

The Annihiation of Arakko

29

Behold me, Great Ring of Arakko!

The both-sided one, whose even hands bear the sharp swords of wisdom!

Holder of the Seat of Stalemate! Voice of cool thought and noble compromise!

Lycaon the balanced one is here!

Knife.

THUNK

OWW!

The word **signifies,** if you speak true, a **sharp intellect.**

And a **greater test** yet of such a mind-- **to know when to dodge.**

Indignity! And a *poor* example!

For I heal from even the most *cowardly* of sneak attacks--as *reasoned debate* will always win out over those who would *silence*--

Enough, Lycaon.

You're not the *first* newcomer Lodus has tested...

SPLUK

...and we have more *pressing* business than your *grand entrance.*

Indignity upon indignity!

Where is the *decorum?*

Ororo is right. **Enough.**

We are only *eight*-- still missing our **Seat of Dreams**--but we have a *quorum,* and we should proceed.

Jon Ironfire-- *first* of the White Sword's Hundred-- has the floor.

The ***Ninety-Nine***, now. I'm of the Hundred no more.

Blue cut me loose from his *healing*-- from his *army*-- and now...

...now I walk ***alone.***

He left me *this.* The Ivory Blade, ***Purity,*** that gave him that *name* you call him--***White Sword.***

He knew if this was taken by the ***enemy,*** it would be the *end.*

The enemy? ***Which*** enemy?

Have the demonic forces of ***Amenth*** risen *again...?*

Worse. The forces of Annihilation.

What?

The helm was *destroyed--*

The helm is not the ***staff.*** Its power is more *subtle*...but, perhaps, more ***potent.***

Particularly clutched in the cold hand of--

Wait. ***Look.***

Someone approaches.

Already?

They look... *familiar.*

It surely cannot be...

It *is.*

Alone... *with no army, with no* ***Horsemen...*** *yet with* ***all she needs...***

What are you *talking* about, Lodus?

Who is...?

Oh.

Yes.

Finish your *sentence,* Jon Ironfire, last of the Hundred. *Say my name.*

In the hand of *WHO?*

...

In the hand of Genesis.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXXX

Kobak Never-Held took stock, scenting the air. If Genesis returned as a threat, the threat was to him -- for the Mother of Arakko would not be satisfied long without her old chair underneath her. So be it. Kobak, more than most, was not afraid of a life that ends.

Lycaon Two Wolves bowed his heads in reverence. He prided himself on the two brains in his double skull -- in this case, they let him see in Genesis both a skilled tactical leader and a living goddess who demanded absolute reverence. His tail wagged. Such objectivity!

Ororo of the Storm took a breath, and the wind flowed with it and through it. Attuned as she was to the world and sky, she could feel the contrasting interplay of energies around Genesis -- and also around the staff she carried. There was power there, too, of a kind she had faced before. Adversarial. If it spoke, she must not listen.

Above Lactuca, the stars were in their places. This would not affect them.

Lodus Logos blinked once /sensing danger / assessing the threat.
Genesis the fighter / had little love / for the poet class.
And less love still, perhaps / for changing times / and those who changed them.

Sobunar felt strange eddies under his skin, ancient blood-currents turning in new patterns. The face on the staff was like a vast moon, filling the sky. Tides, he thought, and an ice age crept through his inner ecosystem.

Ora Serrata witnessed. Had laws been broken? Would creating a law to retroactively have been broken help the situation? It had before. But then, she had made a number of mistakes recently -- with Genesis returned, the fragility of her position was palpable. Not yet, she thought. Not me.

That-Which-Was-Xilo gazed upon Genesis, trying to predict her actions. Once she was the central character of his history -- now all the volumes were gone, ash and dust. From the surviving chambers of antiquity inside his writhing collective, a thought rose. Survival requires a fusion. The being who had once been Xilo considered candidates.

The Seat of Dreams sat empty. The new poet of Arakko had not yet come.

And is this my welcome?

A desert of bones where proud mutants once lived?

A Great Ring so lessened? A history so diminished? A feckless poet in the seat that guides the turn of the world?

If I was weak enough for tears, I would shed them now-- at how far Arakko has fallen.

Arakko has fallen.

Did... did someone *speak...?*

I heard nothing. But, then, *hearing* isn't your *strong point*, Ora Serrata.

You who *oversaw* the law of my land. You who were my *iron gaze.*

Why do you *allow* the lies of a ***madman*** in this space?

It ***offends me,*** Ora.

Madman.

I--I--

He *seemed* coherent--

Did he not come here from the White Sword's own spire? *Death* is their daily sacrament, *rebirth* their nightly religion. ***These are not sane people.***

Of *course* they'd try to stir up a *civil war* between us.

Even such a lessened Great Ring as *this* can see it, surely? That the boy is *mad?*

See it."

In his *delirium,* this escapee from the Hundred's *asylum* even considers the nobility of Arakko as ***equal to daemons...***

The daemons *turned up to fight.* ***You*** never came.

You're *lower.*

You--you *cannot say such things to her--*

I say what I please. You know *why* it's the Ivory Spire?

We didn't spin that ivory from the *air--**we*** weren't ***fancy*** mutants with ***fancy gifts.***

Be *silent--*

We built it from our bones!

As we *died* and we *died* and we ***died!*** For a *hundred years,* a *thousand years!* ***Waiting!***

We were the ***front line!***

We were the *first wave--*and ***you were meant to be the second!*** Our *reinforcements!*

Yes, we died every day-- because *you left us to die!* ***I was there,*** Genesis!

Where were you?

...

I'm sorry.

"Reinforcements"?

Do you *hear* him? This grubby little *nobody* you've allowed to address you?

Do you hear him *beg for help?*

Beg.

For help.

I'll carve you where you-- hnrrmph!

You've said enough. I want to hear from *others.*

I want to hear their *excuses.*

That... that word. *Help.*

It is...not the ***shame*** it once was...

Shame.

It is...we are...

We have ***fallen.***

Yes. You *have.*

It is such a *simple* concept-- ***the strong survive.*** The weak do *not*--for if they *did,* they would be *strong.* Thus, life is a ***test.***

How can you *pass* that test if another takes it *for* you? And how can *they,* in turn, be strong--if ***you*** fight for ***them?***

Our mutant weapons *define* us-- our feats of *power* place us in a glorious *hierarchy.* ***We*** may rise and fall-- ***the hierarchy is eternal.***

So how can we truly *win* if none ***lose?*** How are we truly *thriving* if there are none ***beneath*** us?

How can we ***conquer*** if--?

BOOM

Is *that* what we are?

Is that what you *fought* for, through the millennia--what you stood against ***Annihilation*** for? To hold that *same power* in your *own hand?*

Is that all we can be?

You bring your *feelings* to a place of *cold facts.* The strong are *strong,* and the weak are *weak*-- ***that is simply nature.***

But-- *with the proper encouragement*--the weak can be made *stronger.*

Hrrnn--

This time of *"peace"* was a time of ***opportunity.*** A time to *fortify* ourselves-- to fortify the *Earth.*

To ***teach*** that world--*which we coddled with our sacrifice*--to ***stand on their own feet.***

Rrarrh!

Instead-- *under your influence*-- Arakko ***fled,*** to grow fat and complacent on a world of *luxuries.* And paid a *dear price.*

For the ***Seat of Loss,*** you ask many *questions.* But I only have ***one*** for you.

Grrk--

Who's this "*we*," White-Hair?

While *true* Arakkii fought and died--against the ***daemons of Amenth*** and the ***Eternals of Earth***--

--where were you?

The...the words of the *Unarmed King*...

If she wasn't ***here***...she was...

Nowhere.

...Coward.

All of us...***soft cowards***...

You speak ***wisdom***, Lady Genesis. This *newcomer* has led us into ***error***.

And in the spirit of *compromise*, I would go ***further still***--

NO!

I will not hear this slander! I faced Ororo in the Circle Perilous *myself*--and ***she prevailed!***

She was *instrumental* in caging ***Uranos***--

Not *killing* him?

And what *is* this "*instrumental*"? If Ororo was *truly* to be respected, she would have finished him ***alone.***

Instead, as I hear it, she leaned on ***humans*** and ***dying old men.***

So *forgive* me, Kobak Never-Held, if I will not take a *personal endorsement* of her *brave character...*

...from one who ***wept like a child*** over a ***single death.***

Enough--

Miss.

Enough ***indeed.***

A *crying child* sits in my seat. That is an *insult against my person--* ***one I will not tolerate.***

Do you accept my ***challenge,*** Kobak?

FZZZZT

Here and now.

Let *this* be our circle--*these* our witnesses.

And let none interfere.

Ha.

You will lose, Never-Held.

You will die...

I'll make it *quick*, at least.

I don't want my chair to get *cold*.

Kobak Never-Held! Stand down!

I claim prior challenge--

--I was here first!

By a thousand years!

For the Spire!

For the Hundred!

Miss.

For *nothing*, Jon Ironfire.

For a ***wasted chance--***

Nnhh--

--you *gave up* what you were charged so long with keeping.

Poor ***Blue.*** He picked the ***wrong warrior,*** it seems.

Non-mutant weapons are allowed in challenge. This is *mine--**Purity,*** the Ivory Blade.

Any last words, Kobak Never-Held?

I will not *allow* this, Genesis--

Genesis is right.

What--?

Genesis is right!

FWOOSH

You would sully our most *sacred traditions?* Have us turn our backs on *all we have ever been* to embrace *your* soft ways?

You have blinded us with honeyed words *long enough,* Ororo! Now I see it *plain!*

And I challenge *you!*

Fight.

You truly want *rule by the strong,* Sobunar? You want a world without *mercy* or *pity?*

Then I will *show* you that world! It will be *my gift to you!*

And we shall see what happens when the *ocean* in your blood becomes a ***tempest!***

Lactuca of the stars!

You know all things-- you know this is wrong!

Maybe- maybe. Maybe *not.*

What is it to *me?*

Genesis wants to shape Arakko's *soul* in her own image.

And she has *lost that right!* *She* wore the helm! She *failed* Arakko!

Now she wants to *own us*-- and I call *that* a *challenge to all!*

Let us *answer* it, then, not by *her* rules-- but on *our own terms...*

The stars move still, Logos. *What is a world to me?*

And yet... the staff *tips* the *scales* with whisper-whispers...

Tip them *back,* then. To be strong is to *survive,* says Genesis?

Rebels of Arakko.

Survive.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXXXIII

Lodus Logos knew what he was asking of Lactuca.

Genesis had challenged Kobak -- Sobunar had challenged Ororo.
Fleeing a challenge was against the most ancient law of Arakko;
likewise, forcibly removing one combatant from the chosen field of play was an insult few would bear. It would be decided later -- by Ora Serrata, in huddled communion with the remnants of her Inward Watch -- that Lodus' plea had combined the two into a crime even more ultimate, an absolute rejection of Arakko's most deeply held principle. This, then, was the casus belli for the Genesis War.

Later, Lodus would claim that he was justified -- that the whispered words of the Annihilation Staff had already sullied the challenges in question and that Genesis herself, after all she had done, was no longer fit to lead. But on one occasion during the long days that followed -- after Isca and the Vile had emerged to claim their own territories and take their own sides -- Lodus would declare to me a more hidden truth.

The concept of challenge / is obsolete. / The times have moved on.
In far-off Krakoa, /the Crucible / is our example.
Two meet, two fight, none yield / except, through trial, / to a truer self...

What vision was he reaching for? Not resurrection -- Lodus, for all his futurism, had no fear of a life that ended, nor desire for one infinitely prolonged.

Perhaps, like all great artists, he left his verse open for interpretation. I have a clear memory of understanding -- yet cruelly, the precise nature of that understanding has not survived the many changes the collective has endured.

Those were strange times. When Lodus spoke to me in that unguarded moment, I was no longer Xilo.

I had no name at all.

They *ran*...

I--I don't think it can be *called* that. *Legally.*

Lactuca committed an insult by *interfering* though... so you *could* take it as... a ***challenge***...

You could.

If you ***wanted*** me to challenge you.

They ran.

They ran. You may not know what you call it--*I know what I saw.* ***Weakness*** displayed as ***cowardice.***

You have *all* lived at the whims of the weak for *too long.* Peace and prosperity have ***coddled*** you--and these bones show the *price.*

But those days are done. ***The rightful rule has returned***--and when the *true mutants of Arakko* march to war...

...it will be under *my banner.*

X-Men Red #13 Variant by Natacha Bustos

To War We March

31

THE FIRST ACT OF THE WAR WAS ONE OF CREATION.

GENESIS REACHED OUT WITH HER MIND, WITH HER MUTANT WEAPON, SEEKING OUT THE SECRET SLEEPING HEART OF ARAKKO PRIME.

FOR LONG MOMENTS, SHE COAXED IT LIKE A FLICKERING FLAME, INFUSING IT WITH THE ENERGY OF LIFE, IN PATTERNS REMEMBERED FROM THE HALCYON DAYS OF OKKARA.

AND WHEN HER MINISTRATIONS WERE DONE--WHEN THE ISLAND'S HEART BEAT STEADY AND STRONG--SHE WHISPERED IN ITS EAR...

...AND WOKE IT UP.

THE FIRST VICTORY IN THE WAR WAS A PROPAGANDA VICTORY. NONE WHO WERE ON THE ISLAND WOULD EVER FORGET THE MOMENT--AND THE WORD SPREAD QUICKLY.

THE LIVING ISLAND WAS ALIVE AGAIN, AND THE MOTHER OF ARAKKO WAS ONCE MORE IN THE SEAT OF VICTORY, FIRST AND LAST CONSULTED ON ALL MATTERS--FOR THE VICTORIES WOULD SURELY NEVER END.

THE STAFF IN HER HAND WHISPERED THAT IT WAS GOOD.

AT GENESIS' SIDE--BUT NOT ON IT--*LACTUCA* WATCHED.

BY REMOVING THE REBELS TO THEIR OWN CORNER--GIVING THEM THEIR FAIR CHANCE--SHE HAD COUNTERED THE ANNIHILATION STAFF, THAT WHISPERED IN THE MIND.

THE PLANET MAINTAINED ITS ORBIT. THE STARS CONTINUED ON THEIR PATHS. THERE WAS NO FURTHER NEED FOR ACTION.

ONE SIDE WOULD WIN. ONE SIDE WOULD DIE AND LACTUCA WOULD WATCH.

CRAIG MARSHALL COULD FEEL THE WIND CHANGE.

IN THE COMMUNE, HALF HIS NEIGHBORS WERE TALKING LOUDLY ABOUT THE PAST GLORIES OF ARAKKO--THE OTHER HALF TENSE AND WATCHFUL. HE CAUGHT WORDS LIKE *WEAPONLESS* AND *HUMAN* AIMED AT HIS BACK.

PETE CORBEAU HAD MESSAGED HIM DAYS EARLIER, OFFERING A POSTING AT PORT PROMETHEUS. MAYBE IT WAS TIME TO REPLY.

SOMETHING WAS WRONG WITH THE DAY'S CATCH.

IT WAS ONE OF *SOBUNAR'S*--ONE OF THE FIRST GENERATION, BORN FROM HIS VEINS. BUT THE FISH HAD BEEN SLUGGISH AND CONFUSED, ALL BUT HURLING ITSELF UPON THE SPEAR.

THE FISHER KING FEARED THE WORST.

IN THE MORROWLANDS, *EYELESS RHO* WAS SEIZED BY INSPIRATION.

EMPTYING HIS MIND, LETTING HIS BRUSH FIND THE PAINTS AND THE WALL AS IT WISHED TO, HE ALLOWED THE WORK TO SHAPE ITSELF. HIS FELLOW ARTISTS STOOD BACK, WARY, AS THE PROPHECY TOOK SHAPE.

ON OKKARA, SWORDS WERE A FORM OF ART. THE MORROWLANDERS WERE ALREADY FASHIONING THEM AGAIN.

IN *PORT PROMETHEUS*, THERE WERE RUMORS OF A SHIFT IN POWER ON EARTH, THOUGH THE DETAILS WERE SCARCE--SOMETHING AFFECTING THE MUTANTS.

AT THE LOCAL BAZAAR, BLASTER SALES WERE THROUGH THE ROOF. THE KREE/SKRULL AND SHI'AR DIGNITARIES EYED THE BARGAINS AND EACH OTHER, WONDERING WHO WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE.

TENSIONS WERE HIGH.

IN THE *RED LAGOON*, TENSIONS WERE HIGHER.

What have you done?

Yes, I asked Lactuca to use her power to move us through space.

But what choice did I have? Genesis' staff held sway over us!

We'd all have submitted to her control-- or died where we stood--

You said there was more to life than living! Did you lie?

I was challenged, Lodus!

Challenged for my seat!

Name one of Arakko who has ever sat on the Great Ring and not defended their place on it!

You brought that shame on me! You!

KRK

Kobak!

That's enough--

Enough?

Ororo, it is taking all of my restraint not to loose a tide of spines that would tear all this to rubble!

Tell me why, Lodus Logos!

Before Ora Serrata comes to give fitting punishment for the crime of all crimes, tell me why!

Tell me why you hate me enough to do this to me--

Because I didn't want you to die!

I *care* about you. I care *for* you.

I didn't want you to die like that.

...That wasn't a haiku.

Then I have found a truth art cannot cage.

I wronged you, Kobak.

No...you meant no insult. If I *die*, let it not be to build *a throne on Arakko.*

I'll find a better reason than that.

Sam's dead.

Frenzy too. Dazzler, Jubilee, Prodigy...all the newly announced X-Men are dead.

Everyone at the Hellfire Gala's dead. Jean Grey's dead.

The Treehouse is burning, so Scott's dead. I think Captain America might be dead.

A lot of people are dead.

The gala was attacked? Jean is...?

The Five--are they--

Not sure. I think so. Resurrection... off the table for now.

I wasn't there--just keeping an eye on it. Planning a late entrance.

Business on Earth--verrry secret. Don't ask.

He sounds concussed--or drunk--

Telepathic hangover. The Professor in my head, giving...orders. Planetary-evacuation orders.

I used the red triangle protocol--telepathic resistance. But it was strong.

Keep... keep thinking about gates...gates, gates, go through the gates...

Drink this.

Why would Charles--

Doesn't matter. Those *intrusive thoughts*... they won't be a problem. For ***anyone.***

All gates are ***locked*** now.

I got up here with ***Cable's*** tech--he doesn't know I have it. But then *that* stopped working, so...*he's* probably dead too.

And we don't know where the mutants who went through the gates *are*.

So *they're* all dead.

And Sam's dead.

...

Who, Roberto?

Who is responsible?

Some *other* dead people.

Named ***Orchis.***

Orchis.

Jean dead, Charles *compromised*, the Krakoan dream in *ruins*... and, at the same time, the Great Ring *splits*...

Don't tell me--***Genesis*** arrived at the meeting, and it all went to *hell*.

I was hearing scuttlebutt about *"political upheaval on Mars"* while I was down there--figured it was just *noise*--

No--nor a lucky guess. Someone wanted ***Arakko*** to fall apart at the same time as ***Krakoa.***

Orchis *orchestrated* this. They must think they can ***use*** Genesis--she'd never work *with* them...

If szzhe *did* make szzuch an allianczze-- what doeszz it ***change?*** Hiszztory is *momentum*-- and with ***Szzobunar*** at her szzide, the people will *liszzten.*

To opposzze her will mean *war.* ***Czzivil war on Arakko.***

What do we do...?

We go to war.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCVII
X WEEKS INTO THE WAR

At the turning point of the war, the forces and lands were arranged thus:

*From **Arakko Prime**, Genesis kept her Great Ring and marshaled her forces. Ten new towers had been created, vast structures that sung of mutant power and mutant magic -- and, as before, they formed both the castle from which she ruled and her ultimate defense. From here, she commanded her legions -- for many had flocked to her banner in search of the promised glories of righteous war. Her offer to them in return for allegiance was a simple one: **they would have their chance.***

*Over and over, she sent her horde into the world, to conquer and hold great swaths of the lands, on the understanding that when these advances stopped -- when they failed her -- **it would be her turn to make war.** And from her seat, first of the Great Ring, **she grew impatient.***

*Her sister **Isca** had retired to the mountains -- **Olympus** and **Tharsis Montes** -- when the war threatened her solitude, she responded, and the war learned better. Rumor had it that a mutant of Earth could find sanctuary here, and that may have been true or false -- certainly none else could.*

*The **Spire Vile** held the **Locus Vile** and the similar miseries of Tarn, whose blood still stained the ground in the Circle Perilous. Their lands were both sacred and profane, and few wished to intrude upon them -- those platoons who did, it was whispered, became raw material for the Spire.*

*The **Sea** belonged to Sobunar and was Sobunar. He had not offered it, and Genesis had not yet asked.*

*The **Stars** belonged to Lactuca. The moon **Phobos** remained loyal to Earth, the orbiting **Keep** loyal to Ororo, but both could truly only watch. And out in the deep void, one by one, **the mercenaries of Arakko** heard news of the conflict and chose sides -- often bringing their fellow warriors with them on the promise of the spoils of war.*

*Port Promethens and the **Morrowlands** formed the locii of Ororo's power. The bulk of the Earth mutants Orchis had exiled to Arakko remained here, torn from their families, fearful and hungry in the refugee camp that had replaced the bazaar. Communal resources were scarce, expected to be shared, and the battle-scarred mutants of Arakko were not versed in giving comfort. There was little comfort anywhere -- the Red Lagoon was a war room now.*

*To the west, her forces held the line at the hills of **Noachis Terra**, mutant weapons of earth-shaping used to build vast walls, moats and treacherous zones of sucking sand -- a no-mutant's land.*

*And to the east was the **Valley of the Fallen.***

DAY SEVENTY OF THE GENESIS WAR. THE BATTLE OF THE FALLEN.

THEY SAID THAT NO WAR WOULD BE MADE IN THIS SACRED PLACE.

THEY WERE WRONG.

HOLD THE LINE!

Ground weapons to the front!

Range weapons to the rear!

Fly far, shafts of cold steel! And let your arc guide you to their skulls!

Air corps-- you're flying with me!

If we lose the sky--we lose everything!

For Arakko!

Inspiring stuff, General Nova. You sure battle cries aren't your mutant power?

And what if you're a flier, a puncher and a blaster? And also a planner?

Pick your poison, Roberto--anywhere you're needed.

This is the choke point of the Western Front. Between the Vile Lands and Tharsis Montes--the no-go zones.

If the Genesis Horde gets through here, they've got a land route straight into the Morrowlands.

And they've been planning this assault for a month or more--

Wait. On our right--that speck of light--

I see it.

Is that who I think it is?

"Orrdon, the Omega Rocket. Genesis' new Seat of Loss.

"I guess he hasn't impressed her yet."

He's no pushover. The farther he *flies*, the faster he goes, the harder he *hits*.

About a thousand K's and *closing*--he's going to plow through us like a bullet through *paper* unless I go *head him off*--

How many times? It's not all up to *you*--besides, he's coming in from the *wrong direction*.

He's flying in over *Isca's* territory...

Haaaahhh! Cower, Martian *water-bloods!* For I am ***Orrdon--the Living Star!***

And I am *fully invulnerable while I'm blasting--*

THUKK

You knew the rules. *All of you know the rules.*

My mountains are **mine.**

There he goes. Trust *Isca* to find the vulnerability in the invulnerable.

Well, that's the only freebie we're getting *today*--

--'cause there's a lot more where *he* came from.

Every flier who bought Genesis' *line*...

They can't get past Kobak's troops on the ***ground***-- but if they get *air superiority*, they've *got* us.

Range fighters can take out some of them, but there are folks up there who can eat even ***Lodus'*** words.

So it's *all up to us*--

No. You're on ***Arakko***, Richard.

Genesis made a *challenge to all*...

...and nobody fights alone!

STORM HAD BEEN WAYLAID ON THE WAY TO THE BATTLE-- BUT NOW SHE HAD *ARRIVED*...

...AND THERE COULD BE NO MORE QUESTION OF *AIR SUPERIORITY.*

FOR ORORO WAS THE AIR.

AND AT HER *COMMAND*-

-THE SKY ITSELF FELL TO ITS KNEES.

ORORO *COULD* HAVE TIMED HER LIGHTNING TO *CRUSH* THE ARMIES OF GENESIS. INSTEAD, SHE ONLY BLOCKED THEIR WAY.

IT WAS A SIGNAL OF HER *POWER*-- BUT ALSO, OF HER *MERCY*. SHE KNEW GENESIS WOULD *SCOFF*... CALL IT *WEAKNESS*...

...BUT WEAKNESS-- *MERCY*--WAS WHAT THE REBELS FOUGHT *FOR*.

KRAKOA

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXXXIV

The war that would decide what Planet Arakko became was fought on simple principles.

On the one side, there was Ororo of the Storm, who had led, who had learned, who had stepped aside. She who had shepherded the new era of Arakko to this point, through strife and blood and hardship. In what would be remembered as the Storm Era, Arakko had grown to fit its new land and evolved to fit its new time.

Those who fought and chafed against the realities of peace were free to seek adventure in the void, spreading Arakko to the stars -- or hone their skills for those inevitable moments when the great powers of humanity drew their plans against the great power on their doorstep. But the prison years had ended at last -- and if some felt this new time held less glory than the ancient war against Annihilation and Amenth...Arakko was still free. And that was enough.

But on the other side, there was Genesis.

Who looked upon all we had gained, all we had fought for and grown into, and said, "No."

"No, this is not enough."

She held the Annihilation Staff in one hand, as her battle standard — her proof of the final victory over the ancient enemy. She held Purity, the Ivory Blade, in the other -- her proof that there were no enemies she could not conquer and subjugate.

And when she saw the great powers of humanity -- those same powers that had informed her of Arakko's path, hoping that she would react as she did and timing their own atrocities accordingly -- she scoffed at their great plans and bade them wait their turn.

For Genesis would take two planets as easily as one. She and her forces would fight on until Arakko was as she wished it to be -- and planet Earth as well.

AND THEY WOULD FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

Air forces are pulling *back*--yielding the field. We've *won*...

Won the *day*--*for one day.*

And all it cost us was *another* piece of our history...

What history? All I see are monuments to our *sworn enemies*. I say, *let the wreckage lay in the dirt.*

It'll make a fitting *tombstone*...

...for two *traitors to Arakko.*

"Traitors? *Plural?*

"I wonder."

We've seen no trace of *En Sabah Nur* yet. And he's not the type to be kept in *reserve.*

He may have been the *first to fall...*

Either way--the *Mage* is not the *true threat.*

We haven't seen his *children* yet either. Or *Blue*--or the *Hundred.*

When *they* arrive--***that's when the war starts.***

We'll see. I've danced with Death *before.*

But *whatever* happens now...it'll happen *here.* A surgical strike on ***Port Prometheus*** would cut off our *supply lines* and all contact with our *allies.*

Up until now, Genesis has *avoided* attacks by sea--her hold on ***Sobunar*** might be weaker than we think.

But with her *ground* attacks consistently beaten back, it's her only option. When she's ready, she'll send ***everything she has...***

So be it. If they try to take us here, we'll *hold them fast*--and *finish what they began.*

Arakkii have ***history*** with siege warfare...

...and our history's in our blood.

Nothing and Nobody

32

I was born in a ***prison.*** I have never left, nor can I leave.

Now I find myself in the depths of the ***Tower of Broken Thought...***

C-come no *closer,* I warn ye.

I *killed* the last food bearer-- his thoughts *buzzed,* they ***stung...***

Blind and chained, I am still ***Azazoth***--the dark one, the *mind-ripper.* My power cannot be bound by *any other...*

I am 6 years old.

I have *no* power to bind you with, old man. ***No weapon at all.*** The genetic seers say it will *never come...*

Hah! The fools fear Azazoth so much now, they send a *powerless child* to bear him his stale bread!

Do you know what I could *do* to you, boy, if you get close?

You can tear my mind *open.* ***Flay it alive,*** in pain beyond pain.

Yes! Ha ha, ***yes!***

Cut away my *past,* my *name,* everything I have been. Scar my very *thoughts*-- until they become ***unreadable...***

...until I become ***invisible.***

This is my earliest memory.

Fisher? Where are you?

It's easy to get *lost.*

But the past *already* intrudes so often. It's no great burden to bear for what I've gained.

Xilo has extended his being into my flesh--to preserve the history still in him and add his tactics to mine. Together, we are greater than we were apart.

Yes. *Sorry,* Ororo. I'm here.

I'm here, and it's now.

But the worms *writhe...*

Ignore it. There's *work* to be done.

And here's where we ***stand.***

Argyre's long lost, but our *western front* is holding firm against attacks from that direction.

The territories to the east of us are safe for now. To reach them by *land,* the forces of Arakko Prime have to pass between ***Isca's mountains--***

--and the ***Spire Vile,*** where the *Locus of Tarn* have established their own twisted realm in the chaos, choosing *neither* side--for now.

That leaves the ***Autumn Continent***--mostly *dead land* after Vulcan's rage. Uncontested by *either* side.

To open a *new* front, Genesis has to attack by sea--***Sobunar's ocean.*** She's not tried that route yet--makes me think she's treading *carefully* with him.

But now she'll ***push.*** And the place to push is *Black King Bay* and the river route to ***Lake Hellas.***

Sun's rising. ***Be ready.*** My gut says afore it sets...

...that sea will run ***red with blood.***

And if we work *together,* we can win the day. Because today *is* the day.

The day we win back *everything lost*...or the day we ***die.***

I'm 15 years old. I'm a *blank spot* to the Vile Omnipaths. I've learned to survive. I've learned to *take* life.

All for this moment.

Any improvement on the *Solem* situation?

We cannot take his DNA by *force*, O' Genomic Mage. The *adamantium* skin.

There are *other* means... but he has a certain *discipline* when he wants to.

Physically, he does not... *provide*...

No need to spell it out.

Great Tarn, be *praised*...but why covet *another's* weapon?

To suggest you *needed* unbreakable metal skin would be a ***grave insult*** from any of Arakko...

Any of ***Amenth*** too. But I *don't* need it--I *want* it for study. And for...***posthumous glory***, let us say.

I don't fear a life that ends either, Rurik Slime-weeper.

Death is only the ***beginning of change***...

If Tarn is so eager for death, I can supply it.

I am *not* so eager...but I'm 15, and I'm out of *patience*.

Don't.

The *Omnipaths* can't see into your heart. But *I* can.

If you do this?

You'll die.

...

Isca's not with him. I may not get a better chance...

To what? Replace him with the *next* in the chain?

The *War-Child*, the *Summoner Scion*, ***En Sabah Nur's*** grandson--he's hungry for more power and influence. He'll *welcome* Tarn's fall.

Do you want to replace *evil* with *evil?* Or just feel like you did ***something,*** as you die at the Weapon-thief's hands?

More fool you. I've no weapon for him to *steal.*

I have ***nothing.*** And with *enough* nothing, you can do ***anything.***

In Arakkii culture, these are *nonsense words.*

She accepts them immediately.

Then let's not only do ***one*** thing.

Her name is ***Zsora.***

CONTESTED TERRITORIES OF ARAKKO

- GENESIS
- THE BROTHERHOOD
- THE VILE
- ISCA
- UNCONTESTED

Here.

Yes. *Here*, I think.

Not too far from *shore*-- but out of their *range*.

***Genesis*--as *Seat of Below-Us*,** I must protest this action.

We are *Arakkii*. We are *enough*. And my ***ocean***...it does not ***belong*** to the land.

My children are not yours.

This is not a decision for the *depths*, Sobunar.

We are at *war*--***all*** defers to the ***Dawn***. And as *neither* side can currently advance by *land*...

Lycaon? What does the *Seat of Stalemate* recommend?

You are wise indeed to call on *me*, Great Genesis.

For my twin brains see *both sides* of all issues and thus can find the *ideal midpoint between them*...

...and *that* tells me we should *follow* your wisdom *in all things.*

Wisdom.

Wisdom *indeed.*

I'm glad I can at least count on *you,* Lycaon the *Just.*

Well, *I'm* with ***Sobunar.*** We've got *strong boats,* built by *strong mutants*-- we don't need more from his ocean than permission to *sail* on it.

We don't need *any* of this plan! Castor's *right*-- we can answer this challenge *ourselves*--

No.

Ororo's rebels have weakened not only *us* with their heresies, but the *planet itself*--and *every part of it.* The very ***concept*** of Arakko is weakened.

A *challenge to all* may be *answered* by all-- *and all means all.*

Satis Exotica...

...you have legal permission to proceed.

Drip, drip, drip my blood.

My blood to *yours*, Sobunar. ***Blood brothers,*** now--eh?

My blood. My *weapon*. My ever-flowing *fountain*.

The *all-nourishment*, that none of *Arakko* would ever partake of...because it carries ***the taint of insult.***

It confers *strength*. Creates *perfection*. Arakkii are too ***proud*** to drink from me...

...but a *fish* has no pride. A *sea beast* has no honor.

So ***battle,*** Sobunar's children. *Fight each other for every drop...*

...for only *one* will be worthy of ***Exotica's gift.***

Only *one* of you will be made *great* enough...

"...to carry our *gift of death* to the enemy."

This is ***Eye In the Sky*** calling ***Ground Control***-- over.

Big, still only half-repaired, mostly empty...pretty *lonely*, 'Ro. It's me and ***Hairbag*** up here, and that guy's got breath you wouldn't believe.

Still, if we hadn't drawn the short straws to keep the place running on *gala night*, we'd all have got *Xaviered*, so...

Ships headed your way--looks like a decent-sized *strike force* but not an *army*.

Either they're just *scouting you out*, or they're *real* confident...

Ships? I was expecting an attack from the *sea*, but even so...

Over an ocean, I can create tidal waves that will sink a *battleship* if I must. Genesis *knows* that.

Is this truly *all* she brought...?

Sadly, no.

Look *down*.

...

Bright lady.

I see the beast rise from its hiding place beneath the water, growing and mutating even as it surfaces.

I see it with *my* eye--and with *Xilo's*. Something about this monster connects to the *history* in us. In ***me***.

I'm glad you're with us, Peter.

What can you ***see?***

Peeper. Good to hear your voice.

How's the ***Keep?***

The worms threaded through my bones and organs *flex* and *writhe*.

What are you ***telling*** me, Xilo...?

The New History of Arakiko

Chapter DCCCXV

In the abyssal prisons, there was little hope to be found, and it came in three forms.

The First Hope was in **Obeisance to Annihilation.** *For it was possible, if you bent the knee and accepted the way things now were, to continue to live, and even to continue to live mostly untroubled, if the Vile did not choose you for their experiments. Indeed, the closer to Annihilation and to the ruling family you stood, the easier it was to believe that you were not conquered, but conquerors.* ***Did not Genesis wear the helm? And did not Genesis rule over the Great Ring? How was this so much different to before?***

Not everyone could live that way. **Solem**, *the silver-skinned, who laughed and loved on the battlements and was the song of the siege, attempted to live as freely as he had done, though perhaps more cynically. But eventually, he was forced to choose between his freedom and his pride. He chose the latter, at the cost of a life close to the royal house, the son-in-law* **Bracken** *-- and for this, he was confined to the Tower of Broken Will. A formality for the sake of* **War**, *Bracken's wife and Genesis' child -- for Genesis herself had cared little for Bracken, and Annihilation cared for no creature that lived. With his wile and wit, Solem modified his confinement to his liking, and an unspoken truce was established -- he would live in luxury, and no more would die at his expert hand.*

The Second Hope, of course, was in **Death.** *No Arakkii feared a life that ended.*

The Third Hope was the thinnest of all, and that was **Rebellion.** *But the Vile Omnipaths caught even the thought of it eventually, and the punishment was severe -- not the death of all but simply the death of one. And this was an effective punishment, for rebellion was most often the dream of romantics -- loyal friends, lovers, siblings-in-arms.*

But if you could mask your thoughts and emotions -- and there were those who could, through power, through training, through sacrifice -- there were things that could be done to strike against the systems of Annihilation. Destroying punishment records, disrupting Vile experiments, low-level assassinations -- all these saved lives, all these struck at the regime. And there was always the chance that an opportunity would arise to topple it all at a stroke.

And for that chance, the **Night Seats** *waited.*

I'm 45 years old.

I am *Syzya of the Smoke.*

I hold the Seat of *Nowhere*-- and I call the Great Ring to account.

I have a wife now. I have children.

I am *Zsora of the Spirit Flame.*

I hold the Seat of *Nobody*-- *and I call the Great Ring to account.*

I have thirty years of small, secret actions behind me. I've done much...

I have no name.

I hold the Seat of *Nothing*-- *and I call the Great Ring to account.*

...but never *enough.*

And *I* am *Solem of the Silver Skin,* I hold *nothing* I can mention in polite company--and I call *this wonderful entertainment.*

You three *honestly* think you have a *hope*...

It's not *about* hope. To be of Arakko is to fight *without* it.

We fight *knowing we'll lose*-- though we'd have more of a chance if you *helped,* Solem...

I let you meet *here,* in my lonely cell, which no one visits. And I even send away my *usual* visitors, just because I *like* you --

--and because your *weapons* let you pass my notes and keep my *secrets.* Tarn's great *Omnipaths--so all-seeing...*

...yet blinded by smoke, burned by flame, bamboozled by the lack of a name...

An *epic song* I'm composing for your awesome victory. Now what rhymes with *"awesome"?*

Dare I say *"foursome"...?*

Solem. I've told you before.

Business before pleasure.

In a *week*, Tarn makes the trek to his ***Vile Colleges***--and, this time, ***Annihilation*** will go with him, to inspect his new *abominations*.

As protection, the ***Horsemen*** will ride alongside--and ***Isca***, for good measure.

But why *all* on a *single journey?*

Fear of the ***White Sword.***

His ***Hundred*** can die as many times as Isca can *win*, after all.

Even so... the ***Annihilation Helm*** hides the truth even from *me*, Syzya.

And some things are *too good* to be true...

Maybe.

But I vote with your *sister*, my love.

This chance comes *once and once only*--I say we ***use*** it.

Ora Serrata dies first. Once out of the law's shackles, the Great Ring can act--

That simple, *hmm?*

It's our *chance*, Solem--should we *ignore* it? We don't all have *your* long life to wait in.

True. I'm *ageless and beautiful*--and my ***heart's*** as unbreakable as my ***skin.***

But that's not true of ***everyone,*** is it?

We ignore him, of course. In his cell of luxuries, Solem has *everything*...

...and we have *nothing.*

Or so we tell ourselves.

The creature lumbers toward Port Prometheus. It is vast, slow, ungainly...a *blunt object* for *blunt hands.*

Genesis created the ***Ten Towers.*** She rebuilt Arakko as a sleek *machine of death.* This clumsy attack is *unlike* her.

In my heart, Xilo *squirms...*

Ororo takes to the air. No one else lifts a finger. *No one sees the need.*

The air ***freezes...***

...and in the upper atmosphere, a ***hailstone*** forms, the size of a *giant's skull.*

In *hurricane wind,* a *blade of grass* may pierce the bark of a *tree...*

...and this is an *iceberg.*

Death comes *efficiently.* As efficient as ***Genesis*** should be...

Xilo coils in my spine.

Merged as we are, he can only speak in *warnings* from his history-- *and my own.*

The present becomes the *past...*

...the past I can't forget.

I'm 45 years old and a day.

At that age, a man should know he's a fool.

It's a *fine* thing, to fight knowing you will lose.

Less so after you've *already* lost.

All that work, all those years. *Rats* nipping at the heels of a *legion*. We had our suspicions.

But now, having heard *every word* of your treacherous plot...well, an *example* must be made.

How? Did *Solem* betray us...?

Don't mention that name to *War*. She imagines he suffers.

Now, your teleporter has *fled*, and we will deal with *that* crime when we catch her. The prisons are a maze she can't *escape*.

But you know the punishment for *conspirators*--*one dies to teach the others*. And in *that* law...

...there is *no restriction* for age.

Mother? Father?

What's *happening*...?

They know *nothing!* **They have nothing to do with this!**

If *anyone* should die, it should be--

I take it on myself.

Zsora--no--

Was I supposed to let you get there first?

I swore an oath, my love. One I cannot break.

To protect you...

...with my...

...life.

She leaves nothing behind.

For that is what I have always been...

Has the lesson been learned?

Good.

And now that we all trust each other...a *secret.*

It wasn't Solem.

Genesis wears the helm. Genesis whispers to *plants*. Inside your gut, there is *flora*. My spies were *inside* you.

Do you *understand* me; King of Nothing?

You have no weapon. I have *all* of them.

You will never escape.

Weakling.

...and what I remain.

Inside.

A spy inside...

A man of *nothing*...

...who speaks too late.

Roberto! Burn the corpse!

What...?

BURN IT NOW!

Too late.

The *seed* in the fish-thing's body grows *faster than thought--stronger than diamond.*

An old memory rises like *bile*--from before *Xilo*, before *Stulgid*, before the *one land* was *two*. An old memory...of ***old magic.***

I know its *name.*

The Okkara Gate.

Krakoa and ***Arakko*** can only grow gates *half* as potent--for *this* needs no *answering* gate to link with. Instead, it *creates* one at the destination.

This magic feeds on ***spilled blood***--*the fish-thing's blood, the blood we provided*--and grows across ***realities...***

...to the *Ivory Spire*--*in the lands of Amenth*--

--and the *nightmares waiting there.*

Arakko. It's been a long, long time.

May we come in?

X-Men Red #15 Variant by Jeff Dekal

The Fall of Prometheus

33

SPACE. ON APPROACH VECTOR FOR PLANET ARAKKO.

Leaving warp now. Estimate thirty minutes to *Port Prometheus.*

So, Craig-- when you *joined* NASA, did you ever picture yourself ferrying *mercenaries* to a war on *Mars?*

Sorry-- *Arakko,* I should call it now...

We should. But...*no,* Dr. Corbeau, I can't say I saw *any* of this coming.

Everything I'd ever *theorized* about growing crops on a *terraformed world*... thanks to *Ororo* and the *X-Men,* I got to *do* it.

And I thought that was *all* I came to do. Just...*science.* Like if things got crazy, I'd just grab a shuttle home--I wouldn't *pick a side.*

It was still *Mars* to me then--but *now*...now it's *Arakko.*

"And Arakko has a way of making things *personal.*"

...

So! *Children!* I hear your home was *destroyed horrifically* and everyone you ever loved is *dead!*

But *take heart!* The Prince of Power *knows how you feel!*

My planet was *likewise* annihilated in a battle with a *fearsome villain!*

Granted, it was *I* who did the *annihilating...*

But they say *'tis the thought that counts!*

And as I'd given it *no thought at all*, it therefore *doesn't count--*

Prince.

Shut up, okay?

They're just *kids.*

Glorp, I can't take you *anywhere...*

Do you have something to *paint* with?

Uh, nothing high-tech.

Got a pad and marker I keep for *emergencies...*

That's perfect.

I paint *truth*, you see. It's my *mutant gift.*

Ink can be paint. Paper can be canvas.

Truth is always truth.

There.

Kobb, was it?

I *do* know how you feel, Kobb.

I hope this *helps.* I...

...I hope it's useful in your ***fight.***

Yes.

Thank you.

Kobb...?

It--it has been *months...!*

Wait, Kobb ***spoke?***

And I *missed* it. Bad news on bad news...

Folks--we just got word from ***Peepers.*** We're changing course for the ***Keep***--we won't be able to make Port Prometheus today.

...

Why ***not,*** Craig of NASA?

"Because there *is* no Port Prometheus."

Behold! I command--and *fuel ignites!* Steel and stone blaze like kindling! The fire of War *burns*--

--and the Tower falls!

There. *My* part is done...

And it makes a fine *crematorium, Sister.* But I wonder--*have they earned this funeral pyre?* Is the burning way to the halls of death not reserved for *warriors?*

All *I* see in the flames are *traders and diplomats--small salesmen of meager stock...*

Oh? Are you *offended* by my methods, Famine?

It will not do, War. *It simply will not.*

But have no fear...

...I will correct your error.

Lodus! Fisher King!

Anyone!

This place is burning to the ground--

Here!

Syzya of the Smoke...?

Fisher's with **Roberto**--and **Lodus** is already fighting *outside*, if he hasn't been killed. The word is to get to the far riverbank and *regroup*.

Have you seen anyone *alive* here?

So far, only *I*. But there's no flame that can burn *my* skin.

With your power, you could help me find *others*--

Ask me in a moment.

There's something I have to *do* first.

Something Roberto locked away for *safe-keeping*.

Right after ***Judgment Day***, Ororo entrusted the Night Seats to keep an *ultimate weapon*...

...the Uranos trigger.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXII

*When the Eternals proposed gifting the **Uranos Trigger** to Arakko -- as their apology for the massacre of the Arakkii at Uranos' own hands -- it became a matter of debate for the Great Ring.*

*The concept was simple -- a teleport trigger similar to the one **Druig**, the Enemy of Arakko, had used to bring Uranos to the planet in the first place. Uranos would arrive at some designated point when horror and carnage was desired, an hour later, he would leave, and in the time between, he would simply be himself, with all his resources. For Uranos was the self-appointed grandfather to Thanos himself, and operated under his own interpretation of the Eternal Principles -- an icy philosophy of **All-Death** that would spare none in its wake.*

*The decision of whether to accept or reject the peace offering did not come easily. For an enemy to offer the Arakkii **help** -- and the help of the very being who had attempted genocide upon them, at that -- could certainly be seen as grave insult piled on top of grievous injury.*

*But it was agreed -- **after many wounds were aired and much pain was spoken aloud** -- that no insult was meant, that the Eternals had done their best to make a sincere gesture of contrition within the confines of their Celestial programming. Besides, if Eternals were to be the Enemy, then they would have to be destroyed -- and an Eternal could not be truly destroyed without also destroying the machine that was Earth.*

Lactuca, in her quiet sing-song, made her position on that very clear indeed.

*The Trigger would be accepted in the spirit it was meant, then -- though it would not be left in the Great Ring's possession, as a guard against the temptation to use it frivolously or for personal glory. Instead, it would be entrusted to the **Night Seats**.*

There were also certain safety protocols in place on the Eternal side. The Trigger could not be activated simply with the press of a button or the input of a code -- it was thought-activated, and more, the thought that activated it was a full understanding of what activation meant.

*Thus, the Uranos Trigger could not simply be **pulled** like the trigger of a gun.*

*It had to be **agreed** to.*

And if there was ever a time to *use* it, it's--

NOW?

Sooner than I *thought*, then.

I *see* you, Syzya of the Smoke. I *hear* you. And you do *indeed* hold the *ultimate weapon* in your hand.

You hold ***Uranos the Eternal,*** who is *living destruction*-- and you hold every *death weapon* I have ever crafted.

Yours to loose upon your world for an ***entire hour...***

Speak the word and that hour *begins,* Syzya. The ***killing*** begins--if you only *ask.*

Only ***ask...***

Syzya?

Syzya!

Unnh!

You were... somewhere *else*. And now...now I think we must both be *anywhere* else.

Did you say *Uranos* trigger? What *is* that weapon...?

...

Death, Kobak.

Death that walks.

"This is a *nightmare*."

They just rode in through the gate and *decimated* us. It's *chaos* down there.

We were too *cocky*-- no, ***I've*** been too cocky, too *arrogant*. I didn't plan *ahead* enough--didn't see it ***coming***--

Didn't see the *gala* coming--

Damn it, where the hell is ***Storm***--

Somewhere in the smoke and the demons. I don't know.

I don't know where *Khora* is either-- my own ***daughter***. But we *focus*, Roberto. Do you *understand* me?

We *focus*, and we save *who* we can...

Not enough. It won't be *enough*.

Every death here is on me.

It's okay! I've *got* this!

The fires are under *control*--

Nova!

O Great Kly'bn, be with us now...

...in the hour of the *end*...

You have sculpted a thing of *great beauty*, Famine.

Thank you.

So *many*, when they hear my name and what it promises, think of *drought and desert*.

They lick dry lips, and they wish for cool water...

...not thinking of the *horrors* water can bring.

The flood.

The *raging torrent* that falls upon *prosperity*...

...and washes it clean.

Sweeping away *safety, stability,* every last *seed* and *stick* and speck of *soil*...all the *comforts* the weak cling to...

Gone...

...leaving only the *drowned corpse of hope.*

How right you are, War.

Is there a greater beauty in this world?

SHRAK

KOOM

Thank you, Famine.

Today, you showed me *who you are*. And you showed what *mercy* to you brings--*even a second of it.*

There will be no more.

No. No, there will *not.*

Who are *you* to challenge us, Weather Witch?

You are the spawn of the *powerless*--we are the children of *Arakko's greatest power!* ***The Kings and Queens of this world!***

We are the *true* Omegas--

--and we know our worth!

When the Annihilation Helm took Genesis, you did not side with your mother. *You sided with the helm.*

So ***I*** know your worth too.

And *battle* between Omega-level mutants has *never* been a matter of ***power,*** little flame.

KLIK

It's all about *versatility.*

I *am* the weather.

I am *pressure* and *temperature*. I am *wind*...

...and I am *whirlwind*.

I am *many things*, War.

You are *one* thing.

You are *fire*.

What are you when the fire leaves?

Ororo!

My siblings are *downed*--but not ***dead***, not yet. I can *feel* the spark in them both... *flickering*, not *gone*. You cannot *fool* me, Ororo.

There is *still* mercy in you. *You are not Death.*

And I am.

I *challenge* you, beauty. The Storm against the End--*at our full strength.*

Our *last* ***dance.***

Good, Brother.

Good boy.

My people are dead and dying. The people I swore to *lead*-- to *protect*.

Children are dead and dying, child of Apocalypse.

Do you think your rules can still apply?

...

They have to.

Or what was this *for*?

Oh, Brother dear. After all this time, don't you *see*?

Pestilence...?

Rules are made by the winners.

Richard!

HUK

WHUDD

Suh-saw her. Too late. Arrow in flight.

Up to me. Up...

Up to...

Don't try to talk, Richard. Just...just stay *with* me. *Please.*

I'll fly you *out* of here--

NO. The plague spreads by *touch*-- and kills by *pain.* Only **I** can survive it.

Sister...you ***interfered.***

Grow up, Little Brother.

You'd only have *lost*-- ***again***--out of your misplaced ***puppy love.***

Don't you see? These customs, these *traditions*-- they exist to serve *us*. She's the ***enemy.***

And on Arakko, we *destroy* our enemies-- ***no matter who they are...***

...

Yes.

No matter who they are.

Goodbye, my sister.

...
Death...
She *interfered*-- that was a challenge by insult. And she... she said such things meant *nothing.*
She was *wrong.*
She has to be.
Ororo!
Syzya. Thank the bright lady--you're *alive.*
What's the *evacuation status...?*

Some got out. Thank Okkara, the enemy are taking *prisoners*--Genesis wants subjects and servants.

Those who can still *fight*--a ***fraction*** of our strength--are falling back toward the *Morrowlands*.

And I need to give ***this*** to you.

It *has* to be you. You're the ***Seat of Loss.***

And I can't listen to him anymore.

We meet again, Ororo Munroe.

I've been *watching* your situation. So I won't preamble.

It is as I told ***Syzya***--*release* me and, within my hour of freedom, I will *end your war...*

...by ***ending every single life on this planet*** that is not of your faction.

The trigger is in your hands. The choice is yours.

Choose.

The New History of Arakko

Chapter MCXIII

This was the choice. And Uranos knew it.

Port Prometheus was gone. The Arakkii under Ororo's banner were in a fighting retreat or already dead, and many mutants of Earth with them -- those who were not slaves of Genesis or in hiding under Isca's rumored protection.

With a single thought, a single acceptance, Ororo could turn that tide -- release Uranos upon Arakko Prime once again, to kill and kill and kill until once again that Living Island was a comatose field of spilled blood and sundered bones.

He would end Genesis' threat -- or, if she survived or even triumphed, he would leave her weakened, easy prey for a sneak attack.

All Ororo had to do was accept it. What was the alternative?

Could she place her lofty principles above the people she had sworn to fight for and alongside? She had made the decision to stay, to give her all to this place, to fight here -- because she owed Arakko an obligation, and because this fight was a fight for all mutantkind. If Genesis and her ally Annihilation won, Arakko would become a collection of pawns playing her and Orchis' war games for all time. The whole planet would become a prison.

That could never be the choice. So this was the choice:

She was an Omega mutant, with the weather of the world at her command. She had shown mercy many times... but if she chose, that mercy could end. If she allowed herself to let go... if she let the darkness free, the anger she could feel building in her heart, the pain at what Genesis had caused this world... she would not need someone else to sweep Arakko clean.

This was the choice. And Uranos knew it.

She could release him...

...or she could do it herself.

THE AUTUMN LANDS.

ONCE HOME TO THE AUTUMN PALACE.

Here?

Dead, *lifeless rock*-- but with a *sun* caged below it. *Imprisoned, abandoned.* A useful *ingredient.*

And with the ***Storm*** coming to meet us...*for where else can she turn?*

Yes. ***Here.***

Here we will remake the world.

X-Men Red #16 Variant by Gerald Parel

The Avatar of Life

34

Tell me.

Am I to be your Death?

No, Gabriel Summers, you are *not*. *On any level.*

In *times past,* I ordained my chosen warriors with the names of those I had ***lost***--and wrote their names in *blood* in the sacred texts of humankind.

But *now*...now is a time for *older* concepts.

Had my family *understood* my path, this would be a simple matter.

But it is happening as it *must*--***it is happening now***-- and I do not *need* a new Death.

I need the fire to be fire.

But fire is useful only when *harnessed*--so you will remain *bound to me* and *bound by my will.*

Obligation is a *useful ingredient* in the old magics--and their *confines* will teach you ***restraint.***

Rrrrh! What *is* this? *How dare you?*

I was a king among men--

Simmer down, boy.

We've all got cool backstories...

NO! I will not simmer! I will burn!

You may have freed me from my prison, but--

Yes. The oubliette you strained against for months--which you well deserved, destroyer of worlds--I tore easily, with bare hands.

A small challenge. Mysterium was brought into this plane as coin--base metal, imprinted to the material world and its material laws. The anti-magic.

I would have made it a sword of holy fire...

Let's skip the what-ifs, En Sabah Nur. We're here now--and we all see where this is going.

You need magical elements--fire, earth, air, water...

And the Big A is the hot air!

Ha!

More like water. He flows, he changes, takes new shapes... That's his mutant power--it's who he's been across history.

I'm guessing Storm's the air--

No. Ororo is not a mere ingredient in the magic.

Ororo is the magic.

ON THE COAST OF THE BARREN AUTUMN CONTINENT--ONCE HOME TO THE AUTUMN PALACE--ORORO'S FORCES AWAITED THE END.

THE FIGHTING RETREAT FROM PORT PROMETHEUS HAD GONE HARD. THE WESTERN FRONT WAS LOST QUICKLY TO DAEMONS, ALLOWING GENESIS' FORCES THERE TO SWEEP ACROSS THE LAND.

MEANWHILE, THE WHITE SWORD HAD LED HIS ARMY EAST, AND THE MORROWLANDS COULD NOT RESIST THEM LONG--SO THEY WERE ABANDONED.

OF THE EARTH MUTANTS, THOSE LUCKIEST WERE EVACUATED TO SHI'AR SPACE BY THE HUMAN ALLIES CRAIG MARSHALL AND PETER CORBEAU. VASTLY MORE WERE CAPTURED AND ENSLAVED.

A FEW--THOSE MOST ATTUNED TO THIS NEW WORLD--DIED FIGHTING ALONGSIDE REBEL GUERRILLAS AS THE GENESIS HORDE HEMMED AND HARRIED THEM, DRIVING THEM BACK TO THIS LAST POINT.

GENESIS--THE GENERAL, SAFE AGAIN ON ARAKKO PRIME--WAS READYING HER FINAL ASSAULT. HER TROOPS WOULD SOON BE HERE, ACROSS SOBUNAR'S SEA.

AND ORORO'S FINAL CHOICE WAS YET TO BE MADE.

The clock is ticking.

What will your decision be? *Which massacre will you choose?*

Whatever your answer, it is *on your head...*

You have *company*, by the way.

Give me the trigger, Ororo.

Ironfire.

You know what he offers?

Syzya told me--

But be sure you *know.*

If we free Uranos...

...he will kill *all who march under Genesis' banner.*

All of them, Jon.

You think I don't *understand?*

The *Hundred* march under her, Ororo. My *general* marches under her.

And they *cannot be saved.*

Jon--

How many times have we tried to convince *Sobunar?*

How many times have we asked *Calderak* to remember his pride? Or *Pollux?* Or *any* of them?

And now Genesis' armies have driven us *here.*

She holds the *world*--and every hour, she tightens her grip.

Her and that damned *staff.*

This *has to end,* Storm.

Someone has to end it.

And if you're not *strong* enough--

SHRA-KROOM

SHRZZZZT

Your choice.

I hope you don't regret it...

HIT

All yours.

What have you *done...?*

That was the end of the war! *That was our victory!*

That was *genocide--*

It was *mercy!* It was the innocents under *Annihilation's* spell--*or all the innocents here!*

Genesis is coming, Ororo! Do you know who she *is?* ***Because I do!***

I lived alongside her in a paradise of *art and freedom and love*--and she *feared* it!

The Hundred fought to make Okkara *whole* again--she fought to *break it further apart!*

And if you think Annihilation is *using* her somehow--I tell you that ***she is using it!***

Planting her damned *whispers* in the minds of anyone she thinks is *useful,* no matter what they believed *before--*

And how is that different from your *general?*

Once, he commanded *you*--are you beholden to his whims ***now?***

I wasn't *beholden to a whim*--I was *conscripted into an army.*

Debate the morality if you *like,* but Blue never demanded more from us than the ***mission.*** Ask ***Doug Ramsey*** if the White Sword needed to be *worshipped.**

And when the mission was *done,* he gave me an *honorable discharge.*

He ***ended my service.***

Now I have to end ***his.***

*see X of Swords: Stasis.

Syzya! I need transport to the mainland!

NOW!

You could *stop* him, you know.

Not without *killing* him...

...and there'll be death soon enough.

How's *Richard?*

Speaking of *dying*...

"...he *isn't*. The *Nova Force* is keeping him *alive*--but it only holds the infection at *bay*.

"And the *pain*...our telepaths say he's *shut off*--gone deep inside his own mind. Maybe he'll never come out.

"I keep telling myself I couldn't have *known* about the Horsemen... about ***Pestilence***...about how Nova would react to *her arrow* heading *your way*.

"And maybe that's true. But I do know *this*--"

--he didn't take that arrow so you could press some "*kill a million mutants*" button.

No. He didn't.

He knew there'd be no button.

He's *here!*

Apocalypse is here!

Father?

What do we think? Genesis playing her last card?

He'd have been with her from the start. And he's *unarmed*-- that sends a message.

Keep everyone back, Roberto.

Father--

Death. You've chosen *this* side, then.

You impress me.

The *honor of Arakko* is here. And to preserve it...*I killed my sister.*

Pestilence is dead--at *my hand.*

Well? Do you even *care?*

Father, ***say something--***

Life teaches.

You have *learned.*

Continue your lessons.

...!A!...

You don't stand with Genesis?

I will not stand *against* her--but neither will I stand *aside.*

This world needs-- and *deserves*-- more than she offers.

It needs *magic.*

It needs *you.*

THE MORROWLANDS.

What was this place called again?

I can't *remember*, General. Some *art colony*...

The ones who stayed to slow us fought well. How many of our troops did I have to *raise*?

Twelve of us, sir.

And begging your *pardon*, General White Sword...if you'd had the ***actual*** white sword with you, it'd be *less*...

So, what's death to *us*? Genesis has *need* of that sword, soldier. And it's still *mine*.

When she lets it go, it'll *return to my hand--*

She'll ***never*** let it go.

Hello, Jon.

It's a *trophy*. A *symbol of her power*.

She'll never give it up.

Then so be it--*mine is not to reason why*. I am her *general*-- ***Genesis is my queen.***

But we'll make your death *quick*, Jon. As *befits* one who was once of my ***Ninety-Nine***...

That's ninety-eight.

Ninety-seven.

Ninety-six.

Ten more-- six through fifteen.

Double time. Wear him *down.*

You heard the man. ***Wear me down.***

Do I hear *ninety-five?*

"You made your *choice,* then..."

...Uranos stays in his *bottle.*

He offered the *illusion* of clean hands. The *lie* that I could summon evil and not *claim* it.

The blood on my hands, I *accept*--but they must be *my hands.*

And at least I'd know when to *stop.*

Yes.

Yes, that's what we tell ourselves.

I offer a *different* choice but no illusions. The forces of Genesis *are* coming for your people--perhaps even now.

Then I have to *trust* my people.

And in this...*I trust you.*

Trust can be a *liar.*

I trusted that my *children* would one day stand at the four points of this X--but they have not learned what they needed to learn.

Death shows *some* promise...but Pestilence is *lost,* and the rest are not *suitable*--so I must work with those whom fate has *provided.*

Like *me.*

Hello, Ororo.

Shiro?

You rescued **Redroot** from Otherworld...?*

More than that.

*See X-Men Unlimited #112-117.

It's funny. When I came here, I took land for *myself*--and killed to keep it.

Now I *am* the land Redroot grows in... and *removing* her would kill ***me.***

Rictor was my original choice. But what *would* have been must be sacrificed to what *is.*

I will represent the *water.* ***Orc,*** my daemon familiar--with his *quick wit* and hunger for *knowledge*--is the *air.*

Kind of a *reach,* Big Man...

We make do with what we ***find.***

You!

You ***imprisoned*** me here! ***Buried me alive under solid rock!***

Only *Krakoa* gave you ***amnesty,*** Gabriel.

The *billions dead* at your hands would call what we did ***mercy...***

Once I'm ***free*** of this blue freak, I'll make those billions seem like ***fractions!*** That's ***my*** mercy!

Every-thing that lives will die--

And everything that has died...will live.

Stand in the center, Ororo.

And what magic *is* this, En Sabah Nur?

*Which element in your alchemy am **I**...?*

Genesis' *first act* in this war was to return what had seemed *dead*-- the *living island* Arakko.

To win this war, you must *answer* that act-- ***like for like!***

This is the mutant magic! *The highest mutant technology!*

Let the fire be fire! Let the air be free! Let the earth support the people!

And let water reshape this world!

You are what brings us together! You are the *weather*, the *play of the breeze*, the *fall of the rain*! ***You are the storm!***

You are the breath of life, and the breath of life is in *you*...

*And as you live...so **does the land.***

Now let the living land be born!

E GRATEFUL THAT
THE CENTURIES
HAVE TAUGHT ME
NOT TO WASTE
WHAT MIGHT
PROVE USEFUL!

E GRATEFUL THAT
E CENTURIES
AVE TAUGHT ME
OT TO WASTE
WHAT MIGHT
PROVE USEFUL!

BE GRATEFUL THAT
THE CENTURIES
AVE TAUGHT ME
T TO WASTE
AT MIGHT

In what other realms could we *build* a *home?*

And what would it *cost?*

I MUST WORK WITH THE FORCES OF NATURE, NOT RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER THEM, AND GENTLY SHAPE THEM TO MY WILL.

How do I survive?

What is strength?

BUT, I DO *NOT* KNOW WHY YOU WISH ME TO TAKE THIS BURNT, BARREN *SOIL* INTO MY HANDS...!

HE HAS *FIRE* WITHIN HIM...

GREAT MOTHER--

MOTHER--

--BRIGHT LADY OF THE EARTH AND AIR--

--HEAR THY DAUGHTER'S CALL!

ARAKKO PRIME.

"It's almost over, Sobunar."

Genesis...

The rebellion has been *put down.* The weak once again live *under the strong--in our gracious protection.*

Once the *ringleaders* on their barren island have *paid the price,* we will sequester ourselves in the ***Ten Towers***--and let our *greater* enemy lay *siege.*

Genesis--

That way, the humans will come to *us*--to their *red slaughter.* And I won't let *pride* force me to give up that advantage.

I won't make the same mistake *twice.*

Make the same--

Genesis!

Something is *wading through my blood--through the **ocean!** Toward* us! I can *feel it!*

*It's big enough for me to **feel** it--*

What...?

I can *feel* it here!

Look!

Look!

ACROSS THE WORLD, ONLY A SMALL ARCHIPELAGO REMAINS OF THE AUTUMN CONTINENT.

THE REST IS HERE...

...AND IT WALKS LIKE A MUTANT.

BEHOLD KAORAK.

Genesis!

You claim you speak for Arakko?

Then raise your island and fight.

X-Men Red #17 Variant

by Mike McKone
& Israel Silva

The Mended Land

35

Rise.

ON WHAT WOULD BE NAMED AUTUMN ISLAND, THE REBELS HAD FELT THE GROUND SHAKE. THEY HAD WATCHED THE BULK OF THE CONTINENT STAND AND WALK AWAY.

ON WHAT REMAINED... THEY WAITED.

Rise!

THEY WAITED FOR THE VAST AND TERRIBLE ARMIES OF GENESIS TO REACH THEM.

THEY WAITED FOR THE END.

Rise, Arakko!

IN THE MORROWLANDS, JON IRONFIRE FOUGHT ALONE. NINE LEFT. EIGHT. SEVEN.

HE, TOO, FELT THE END COMING.

EVERYWHERE, THE END WAS COMING.

EVERYWHERE BUT ARAKKO PRIME.

Genesis commands you!

Rise--

--AND FIGHT!

FOR THE LIVING ISLAND, THE END WAS ALREADY HERE.

THE NEW ISLAND *KADRAK* FOUGHT WITH EQUAL FEROCITY. IT WAS NEW LIFE, NEW GROWTH, NEW CHANGE.

RAAUURR!

IT WOULD NOT SIMPLY LIE DOWN AND DIE.

FOR DEEP WITHIN, INSIDE KADRAK'S SECRET HEART, WAS HE WHOSE NAME WAS REVELATION.

Think maybe you could *smooth this over,* -ıñı- ? Genesis *is* your *other half* out there...

We could help *Storm,* at least--

Our place is here.

What Storm *sparked,* we *sustain*-- at least for now. This heart *cannot survive alone.*

This is a battle of *life against life...* to decide what life *means.*

Genesis.

Ororo.

Queen of *commoners.* *Degrader of Arakko.*

A grave *disappointment*--

--and a waste of my time.

Hrrkk--

Frost.

Pressure.

My turn.

Oh? Are we taking turns? As if this is a game?

Then make your move. I await your best.

Miss.

ORORO WAS DIRECTING HER RAGE CONSCIOUSLY, KEEPING IT AT THE FOREFRONT OF HER MIND, MAKING THE ANNIHILATION STAFF HER TARGET.

BUT TO HEAR THE WHISPER OF THE GOLDEN MASK WAS TO OBEY. THUS, ORORO HAD NO CHOICE...

...BUT TO MISS THE *STAFF.*

EAAAHHHH!

AND IN THAT INSTANT OF AGONY--IN THE MOMENT BEFORE SHE COULD CONTROL THE PAIN--

NO!

NO!

--GENESIS FINALLY LET THE SWORD *PURITY* ESCAPE HER GRIP...

...TO RETURN TO ITS MASTER...

...IN THE MORAOWLANDS.

One.

One last time, Blue. And if I have to beg you to hear me, *I'll beg.*

Genesis' only cause is *her own empty glory*-- you're worth *more* than that. *Stand down.*

Please.

NO.

Genesis is right.

... To the death, then.

To the death.

But no need for this *mess*. This close, I have a *clear sight* of the enemy--I can challenge them all *myself*.

I will *look* at them--*each in their turn*--and they will ***stop being.***

Starting with *Da Costa*--

Hm.

He's... looking at *me*.

His *lips* are moving. What's he saying? Did he say my *name*?

"Ora Serrata.

"Never stare into the--

"--*sun*--"

FWAASHH

AAAAAHHH! I'm BLIND!

It's *you* who can't see the truth here, Jon. But Purity will *help* you.

This sword is *pure function*-- ***the act of cutting.*** It'll cut through *all the lies*--

--by cutting your *head* in--

Eh?

KLIK

CLAPP

The *edge* cuts.

The rest, you can *hold*...

...and so can *I*.

SHNIKK

ARRHH--

And if I can hold it--

--I can take it!

Can YOU?

...

Yes.

I heal. It's what I *do*, Jon. What I *am*.

Even from *this*, I'll heal...

I know. *Everything* heals--even a heart cut in two.

Unless something *stops* it.

Unless I put this sword *through* your heart...

...and hold it there until it's over.

Hold the line!

Weaponless Zsen? Was that you?

Stop this, all of you! This cannot go on! I am the law of this land!

The law endures! The law survives all! And I am the law!

Listen to me!

Listen to me...

There are stronger forces than the law, Ora Serrata.

Who is that?

Who's there?

Once I had no weapon.

And that defined me.

But I have one now.

History is my weapon, Ora Serrata...

...and none of us survive it in the end.

NO!

NO!

...

Father?

Do you see what your war has done, Genesis?

Do you see the only way it can end?

"With continents torn from the bedrock. Whole seas boiled or frozen.

"With the end of this world."

You say that. You don't do it.

You claim to be Omega--but can you burn both these islands? Murder the world you created? Do you truly have no limit?

No. You're not strong enough. But I am the true avatar of life...

Aarrrghh!

...and life is an endless war!

Everything that lives fights to survive--each breath is a battle. Simply to function, your body makes slaves of billions of microscopic fungi.

Now--at my command--they turn against you.

When the weak do not serve the strong... the body dies.

That's what became of *Okkara* in the end.

It was the greatest beauty of that ancient world-- but it *lost*. And *was* lost.

The only victory is in *survival*. ***The only survival lies in strength.***

Annihilation culled the *weak* to make way for the *strong*. Now it serves *me*...***and the cull has come again.***

The humans on *Earth* are winnowing *weaker* mutants--not knowing they are thus dooming *themselves* to my...

Really?

Are you *still* clinging to life? *Can't you die with dignity?*

Don't you know when you've--

Ororo.

"ORORO," said the mask.

"**You are dying.** Your body is turning against you. Your organs fail, one by one. **Death,** who you have danced with so many times, readies to take you in his arms...but I can offer a way out. **A reprieve.**"

Ororo said nothing. The mask continued to speak.

"**Genesis** was my way into this world. The **need** in her -- **for confirmation of her worldview** -- was a **beacon** calling me from **Amenth,** as I was called to that dark world from **the lands beyond.** But Genesis has..." *There was a pause, and a note of cold contempt crept into the insidious whisper.* "**...Outgrown her use.** It took far too long the first time to cajole her from her endless prison to further conquests. Given the choice, she will **maintain** -- maintain a siege, maintain her power, maintain a status quo that serves **her.** And I...**I would grow.**" *The voice purred, rich and hungry.* "To **satisfy** that desire...I must at least make the **offer.**"

Ororo said nothing.

"Your needs are more **noble** -- you are not motivated as much by **personal glory.** But I do not concern myself with motivations -- **only with results.** And when you turned down **Uranos,** you showed what results you were willing to **accept.**" *There was a sound like the licking of golden lips.* "With **me** in your hand, you will be right in all you **say** and all you **do.** Arakko will embrace your **wisdom.** Earth will devote itself to your **cause.** The **future** of human and mutantkind will be **yours to shape** -- harmony and equality will be **yours to enforce.** And is such treatment not what you **deserve?** Is that not the **least** that is due to **the Goddess that you are?**"

Ororo said nothing.

A note of irritation entered the whisper's soft cadences. "**Ororo.** This is your **life and death.** Have you heard a **word** I've said?"

"I have heard the word you have **not** said," *Ororo replied.*

"And what is that?"

Ororo smiled.

"Miss."

WRATH OF THE GODS

ORORO DID NOT MISS.

GENESIS SCREAMED--NOT FROM THE PAIN, BUT FROM THE LOSS, THE EMPTY SPACE IN HER SOUL WHERE A SWEET WHISPER HAD LIVED.

HER ANCIENT FOE. HER OLDEST FRIEND.

GENESIS WAS HARDY AND COULD SURVIVE THE LIGHTNING...

...BUT THE STAFF, IN THE END, WAS ONLY WOOD AND FRAGILE GOLD...

...AND COULD NOT.

Annihilation is removed. *Genesis has fallen.*

The debate is decided.

Let all know...

"...it is over."

Nothing is over! I will not accept this!

Right or wrong--*I fight for Genesis!* Even *if* she has fallen! I fight for a world ruled by *reason*--*ruled by the strong!*

Who is *with* me? Who is--

FWASSHH

Enough.

Storm has *won*--Annihilation is *gone.* The challenge was *witnessed by Lactuca*--and through her eyes, *I* witnessed it too.

This war was fought on *false law* and *false history.* Let there be an *end* to such things. *Let there be an end to this.*

I, *Xllora,* have spoken--*who will defy me?*

Who will defy me for a broken mask?

...

When Fisher *melded* with Xilo... this was *always* the endgame, wasn't it?

Why didn't you *tell* me, Syzya?

Would you have let him *do* it?

No. I'd have done it *myself.*

In the prisons, he learned the *toll* it takes when someone steals your death for themselves. He didn't want to pay it twice.

I learned a *different* lesson-- as hard and maybe colder.

Someone has to be the one left behind, Roberto.

Someone has to carry on.

Someone has to *live*...

"...or what was this *for?*"

All right.

On your *feet,* soldier.

...

How do you feel...?

Healed.

And my thinking is... ***clearer*** with Annihilation gone.

Why didn't you do it?

I was *ready* to. I'd said my *goodbyes* to you, Blue.

But in the *end*...well, you were lost either way.

So I trusted the Storm.

"This is the *revelation,* as it was revealed to *me*...

"...that it is not *enough* only to be strong. It is not enough only to *survive.*

"To truly *live...* we must ***thrive.***

"Kaorak and Arakko embrace. *Two islands are one*--the *old* and the *new,* in harmony to build the *newer yet.*

"And in this *union of opposites,* the ***true spirit of Okkara*** is reborn.

"The road was not *gentle,* nor did I tread gently on it. But now--*with eyes wet from oceans of blood and pain*-- I see my destination at *last.*

"Look at us. Look at ***all*** of us.

"*We have finally become what I intended us to be...*"

...and I could not be more proud.

Someday--*when the stars are aligned*-- I will *join* Genesis in exile. And leave a ***mended land*** behind me...

I'm glad you're *optimistic*, -IRI-.

And it's true that things have *changed* on Arakko.

Isca holds her mountains, the ***Spire Vile*** its secrets, ***Sobunar*** is a hermit in the depths...even ***Orc's*** claimed a space for his daemon kin.

Each territory is deciding for itself what peace *means*.

The coming ***Blood Dawn*** will help release *tensions*...but we need to *rest and heal* before Arakko takes the fight to ***Orchis***.

Hasn't that fight already *begun?*

With my wife's ***place of exile...?***

That was the *Great Ring's* choice-- I voted *against*. I can understand the *poetic justice*...

...but ***Phobos*** is a little ***close to home.***

"I'm coming to enjoy the Great Ring's joke, Mother."

Oh?

This Orchis...these are the humans who aimed us like a *weapon*, are they not? *Now the sword is turned back upon them.*

And who deserves it more?

Who deserves it more, Mother?

The Brotherhood does.

Resurrection of Magneto #1 Variant

by Arthur Adams
& Edgar Delgado

The Lightning Path

36

Ororo.

I was wrong.

NO

No no *no* I won't *go* I will NOT GO no no *no* NO--

Ororo...?

NO!

Ororo--

I won't go.

I won't.

It's okay. It's *okay*, 'Ro. Nobody's going anywhere.

I've got you.

And he has. With his *voice*, his *touch*, he brings me out of the dark...

...brings me *home.*

I'm on ***Arakko***, the planet I brought to *life*, brought to *war*, brought to *peace* and brought to *life* again. I'm in the life I *chose*, with the ***lover*** I chose.

Craig...

Yeah.

It's me.

Craig isn't a *super hero* or a *mutant* or a *king.*

We heard commotion. What needs to be ***killed?***

Just a nightmare, kids. Back to *bed*, okay?

Aww.

They're adorable.

Don't tell *them* that. I think it's a *challenge by insult.*

What was that dream about, anyway? The big push against ***Orchis?***

With him, I am not a *queen* or a *warrior* or a *goddess.*

I just *am.*

No.

Something else.

But I am who I am. And who I am doesn't always get to *choose.*

Craig. My summer rain. My rooftop in Japan. My quiet in the storm.

I have to *go*, Craig. It's time.

It's time to die.

[fall__of]
[_____X]

FALL OF X

Storm and her Brotherhood of Mutants emerged victorious over Genesis and her forces in the civil war over Arakko, Krakoa's sister mutant colony on Mars. However, the fight for mutant survival is far from over. On Earth, mutants are being hunted in greater numbers than ever before, hounded after by the anti-mutant organization Orchis. Recently, Orchis dealt a devastating blow to mutantkind at the Hellfire Gala by launching an attack that killed many mutants (including the newly elected X-Men team), led to the capture of Cyclops (who is currently being framed for the Hellfire Gala Massacre of human guests) and succeeded in forcing a mass exile of mutantkind from Earth. Any remaining mutants are scattered and resources strained as the X-Men continue to try to save who they can.

But their problems keep mounting. With Xavier currently indisposed, Storm knows that mutantkind needs a protector, someone who can help turn the tides. Mutantkind needs Magneto. The only problem is, Magneto is dead -- having sacrificed himself in order to defeat the Eternal Uranos -- and even if the resurrection mutant circuit known as the Five wasn't currently among those missing in the mass mutant exile, both Magneto and Storm have destroyed their Cerebro backups, embracing the Arakkii way of life and rejecting Krakoan resurrection. Meaning, if Storm wants to bring Magneto back, she's going to have to go fetch him herself.

1__[STORM]

[_resurrection_01]
[__of__magneto_01]

[fall__of]
[_____X]

KADESH BASE.

"Look for the Fifth Business."

There's a connection here somewhere, Taaia.

Orchis and the "Dominion" we were warned about--Eternity's mysterious enemy who exists outside time and space.

I just wish I knew...

...what...?

Alert.

Spacefold breach detected.

Intruder alert.

Dr. Adam Brashear?

I have a long journey to make--through parts unknown.

And you've been my travel agent before.

AN *INTRUDER*-- COMING THRU "*FOLD-SPACE*"!!! AND DRESSED LIKE A "*WILD-ZONER*" FROM "*REVERSE-TAA*"!!!

IT SEEMS *DEFENDERS HQ* IS THEIR *LATEST* "PARTY PALACE"--!!!

Relax, Taaia. That's *Storm*--I lent her a *dimensional-exploration vessel* once.

She's on our side.

I'm glad to hear you're on *our* side, Doctor.

Oh, *Orchis* represent everything I *despise*, Ororo. But *Iron Man* convinced me we'd stand a better chance if we struck *together*, rather than operate as individuals.

Orchis is *highly organized*-- *tactically, politically, technologically,* even *magically*--and they stole a march on us right from the start.

Smashing their network will take *equal* organization, *superior* tactics and no small amount of *luck*...

...but if mutants are in the crosshairs of *global bigotry*, it is *vital* that non-mutants have their back.

We *must* stand together.

We must *fight* together.

Or society will destroy us simply for daring to exist.

Dr. *Brashear*... I need a *favor*.

I tell him what I need.

I expect indignant refusal, to be told what I want is against the *rules*, against *nature*, against the *last wishes of a dying man.*

Instead, he considers for a moment...then nods, as if I'm asking for help fixing a shelf. *It can be done, and he can do it. **These are the only factors.***

For a moment, I'm reminded of ***Forge***--and in that moment, I know exactly what ***Monica Rambeau*** saw in Adam...

...and I know exactly why she *left.*

So. This is the ***Portal Room.***

And I think *today,* we're going to need the *big* one.

You seem...a little *nonchalant,* Doctor. Are you *sure* you understand what--

You need a door into the ***Waiting Room***--the liminal space between life and death ***Wanda Maximoff*** created for mutant souls.

I'm sure ***Doctor Strange*** or ***Reed Richards*** would tell you that *hacking the afterlife* like that is *impossible...*

...but the impossible is where I like to start.

And all the information I need is bio-encoded *here...*

...in the *Krakoa Gate seed* for the ***Waiting Gateway.*** You say ***Apocalypse*** provided this?

The gates are *locked off*--but ***En Sabah Nur*** and ***Redroot*** used the *old magic* to coax a *facsimile* from ***Kaorak, the New Island...***

Adam nods politely. The words have heavy meaning for *me*--each one ringing with ***history, blood and sacrifice--***

--but to him, they are only *sounds.* He wasn't there.

But he's here *now.* ***And so am I.***

The portal door begins to *open.* Something like *moonlight* washes over me, electrifying as *Tokyo neon.*

Okay... now we check the *safety readings...*

But I already know what they'll say.

I am standing at the edge of a *rooftop.* Below me is a vast *ocean.* I have been here before.

There is no safety.

Only the leap.

Ororo!

Don't--

Storm.

Welcome to the afterlife.

The air is still and silent, scented with *roses*--but nobody is here to enjoy the *peace*. Not a *soul*...

...only the ***soulless***.

You come to ***the Well Beyond the Worlds*** by an *unusual path*, Ororo Wind-Rider.

Still, if *anyone* was to come this way, I should have guessed it would be *you*--there was always ***magic*** in you.

...

Tarn the Uncaring?

What are *you* doing *here*...?

Am I not *mutant?* Am I not *dead?*

Is this not our own private section of *afterlife*, so kindly partitioned off by the *enemy* you *failed* to *destroy?*

Have I not as much a place as *any* in...what do you call it? The ***Waiting Room?***

How *prosaic*-- But, then, I have chosen to ***wait*** here.

...

For *what?*

I'm not afraid of a life that *ends*, Ororo. ***So why submit to one?*** *Endings* are for *other people*.

Praise Tarn.

So if this is the *mutant afterlife*...where is everyone else?

Should paradise be ***crowded?***

Should the souls there be on *call*, summoned for your *pleasure?*

Or maybe it really *is* as empty as it looks. These signs and symbols form ***exits*** as well as ***entrances,*** after all.

How could it be paradise if people couldn't *leave?*

Every word he says makes perfect sense--*like the serpent in the garden*, as Kurt would say.

It's what he *leaves out* that will hurt me.

Now--it's *my* turn to ask a question. Resurrection came to an *end*, I hear--with no telling if that long queue can ever be *resumed.*

And yet here you are. Flinging yourself into ***death*** on the ***moon's road***--as if you have a ***mission.***

Who did you come for?

I could lie.

But Tarn does not *deserve* the lie.

Magneto.

Your killer.

...I see.

You can understand why I'd take that as *a direct insult,* Ororo.

And here we are. In the *Well Beyond the Worlds*... ***the very seat of magic.***

And I have always been...

...the Genomic MAGE!

I wonder, Ororo.

When I *consume your spirit...*

...will you die a *second death?* ***A death of the soul?***

Eternal oblivion... it's a fate I'd certainly *wish* for you.

Or perhaps some part of you will *remain.* As part of ***me.***

And I will listen to your screams ***forever,*** *as sweet to me as the music of the spheres...*

Much as he did when he was *alive,* Tarn likes to give *speeches.*

But like any magician, his *stage patter* hides the *real* trick.

Then why not make it *easier,* Tarn? Why not twist my genetics to your *will,* as you did before?

What's stopping you?

Only my desire to *prolong your agony--*

Liar.

You said yourself that this is the ***seat of magic,*** Tarn.

And I have learned enough of magic to know it is a thing of *symbols and metaphors--**signifiers of power,*** like the icons of *Death, Judgment and Fate* that watch over us.

In this place, we are our *own* signifiers. *Here, I face you as my **truest self.***

And we have *proven*--in the ***Circle Perilous****--* that all your genomic majesty cannot *change* that self in a way that *matters.*

******In* ***S.W.O.R.D.*** *#8.*

It seems the only mutant Tarn's power can *twist...*is ***Tarn himself.***

Congratulations. In *death,* you are as you were in *life...*

...a self-created monster.

We all make choices, Ororo. I made mine *long ago*...

...and I made them in the name of my art.

For all mutants are my canvas!

This is *my* true self! Vast, ever-expanding, *ever-evolving!* Ever-reaching to *new and greater heights!*

What you call monstrosity, I call the *new frontier of being*...and when I *return* to the living world, ***I will journey further yet!***

Behold, Ororo--***the true Homo superior!*** *No longer* mutant--but ***mutation itself!***

And what are *you*, Storm? In the face of this, what can you *ever be?*

Raw material for my design.

An Omega-level ***morsel.***

You keep *talking*, Tarn. As if you can talk me out of seeing the *ground under my feet.*

Who am ***I?*** I am a *witch of the weather,* named for the ***storm...***

...and you are standing on a cloud.

Magic is *symbol and signifier.* If the Waiting Room was carved from the ***seat of magic,*** as Tarn claimed...

...then we must be *careful* which signifiers we *step on.*

That's *if* Tarn spoke the truth--

Not *all* of it. *Nor will he ever.*

Such men *always* hoard their knowledge to profit *themselves.*

But nor did he *lie,* my descendant. Your friend built a *paradise from magic...*

...and this is the garden where magic grows.

I recognize my own face on another, and a *chill* creeps into my heart. I met this woman when I was a *child*--for the *second* time.*

Ashake, magic-maker of *ancient Egypt*--my ancestor, exemplar of the mystic forces in my bloodline. Like *me,* she used her power to *fight the darkness* as best she could...

**In Gambit #2-3.*

...so what darkness does her presence *here* portend?

Walk with me, Ororo.

And *learn.*

Tell me why you came here.

I *hesitate*. Ashake has done *much* for me and mine.

It feels *foolish* to tell her that I threw myself into the unknown on the strength of a *dream*...

Dreams are *vital*, Little 'Ro. They are messages from *Gods*--even sometimes from ***Eternity***, the ***Great All***--and carry *meaning beyond meaning.*

Dreams are ***binding***.

...

I dreamed of Max. ***Magneto.***

He was standing on a *strange shore*, readying himself to enter a *ruined city*--his face turned away but in *torment*.

It was *more* than a dream. It was a ***distress call.***

Yes. But *detail* is important. We are in the place where magic *lives*--symbols and metaphors are the *true reality*.

Anything you can recall may point the way.

His helmet was at his feet... and there was more than *one*. ***Five*** helmets.

I don't know why five...

Five is the *number* of magic--but it has *other* associations.

The fifth sphere is the *sphere of judgment*, Ororo. ***No mercy*** is found there.

I *must* ask... was this man truly your ***friend?***

If you have a deity, butcher, pray to it!

As a boy, I believed.

As a boy, I turned my back on God forever.

You are far too cynical, my friend.

And you, far too trusting. We are both, Ororo, what our pasts have made us, for better or worse.

After all we went through together, I trust you--at the very least--to understand.

For me, our very heaven is a hell.

...

He was many things. He is *owed* many things.

If he is *suffering*...I have to ***try***.

But now I have a question that must be answered.

The mutant souls that were here--*waiting*--what became of them?

Would *you* wait forever?

I do not know where they are. I only know which path they took.

Her road.

The icon she points to is a *burning beacon*, lighting the way to something more *permanent* than a paradise built to wait in.

The face of *Death*...

Then they are *gone*? ***Forever?***

With no hope of return...?

There is *always* hope. They crossed *one* threshold already--and death is not the *barrier* many believe.

By your reckoning, I died *thousands of years* ago--yet ***here I am.***

And *you* can still return from this...

...if you do not ***tarry.***

Clear!

Dammit, Ororo-- ***breathe--***

That...changes nothing.

I came to help my friend and comrade find the *mercy* that is being *withheld* from him--or if he *wishes*, to bring him back to the *fight*.

And if I *must*--

--you'll bring back every dead mutant *with* him? Oh, Ororo. There are forces to which even a ***Goddess*** must bow.

Still, you *are* an avatar of *life*--even here in the lands *after*.

You were ***allowed*** here for a *reason*...

...*let us divine it.*

Swords are sacred to ***Ma'at***, the gray goddess of *balance*--but five is ***Judgment's number***. A ***conflict*** is coming.

One way or another...***the balance will not hold.***

A conflict is already *here*--

Darkness must be fought in *many ways*, on many *levels*. Above--and *below*.

And the one you call ***Magneto*** holds the key...

Riddles and symbols. Once, the way seemed *clear*--now I find myself in the ***labyrinth***, the plaything of *vast and terrible powers*.

The only way forward is *one step at a time*...

How do I *reach* him, Ashake?

From here, the only way is via the *Tower*. It's the way *he* went.

A good sign, if he's not ready for *Death's* road or the *turn of the Wheel*...

What was once an *icon*--like a *sculpture*, close by--now seems *far in the distance.*

How far? How big is it?

Like all magic--*only a thought away.*

You're *already* climbing it.

What...?

This is the *journey*, my descendent. The path *he* took, *in life and in death.*

For every rise--

--a fall.

I thought I controlled the storm here.

But suddenly, I *realize--*

--I control *nothing*. I *know* nothing.

I was so *certain* of my mission to find Magneto, to *save* him--*(to bring him back to a war he'd found peace from, selfish,* ***selfish****)*--and now I find myself conscripted to *another's cause.*

The ground under my feet is shattered. *My certainties are destroyed.* Is this what ***Max*** felt when he turned his back on *God? When his daughter, Anya, died by fire?*

When he struck *Kitty* down and knew how far he'd *fallen?* When Charles made him a *teacher* and he could not protect his *students?*

When he lost all hope--*did it feel like this?*

I do not know. *I know nothing.*

The lightning tears the Tower down.

And I fall...

...to another place.

Greeting/ Acknowledgement/ Warning.

From matter is energy made. From life is information made. Life ends. Information is forever. We are forever/outside ever/beyond ever.

We are Dominion [Phalanx].

You are linear. We are not.

You are single-mind/ morsel/atom. Communion error: not big enough.

More information density required for resource growth into consumable.

So.

Ask.

...

Where am I?

Beyond/"Outside"/"Mystery" subsector designated "**Overspace.**"

Meeting space for cosmic intellects/higher thoughtforms. Accessible via singularity/negative-singularity/"Negative Zone." Origin point: **Multiverse-5/Cosmos Stage VI.**

"The Junction to Everywhere."

Dominion... Adam mentioned one of those.

Are there... *others* like you?

Various exist/work/consume/grow as Dominions exist/work/consume/grow.

One...**threatens.** Infinite power/human-level thought. Threat potential: **infinite.** Threat duration: **forever.**

Omegas/Beyonders were/are afraid. **They are linear. We are not.**

Containment attempted. Multiversal reboot attempted. **Not enough.**

Ace of Crowns. Fifth Business. **Enigma.**

You are linear.

He is not.

I can feel the *danger* in this.

These intelligences *hunger*, in some eternal way I cannot fathom...and each new drop of knowledge makes me a *sweeter meal.*

So be it. Ask your third *question*, Ororo. Make your third *wish*, and pray the genies grant it without asking their *price*...

I am seeking the soul of a man-- ***Max Eisenhardt.***

Magneto.

Mag/neeeee/to. A rare atom.

We looked at him.

*Pared his self to the **base strata.** Cataloged his **pain.** Studied him-- then **sent him on.***

*Not viable/useful/enough information for assimilation/ consumption--but information of **interest.***

You are of greater interest. Worthy. Useful.

Consumable.

Consume this.

SAVAGE SWORD

All I can truly do is *hope*--that my power in this place is *symbolic* enough to *sting*.

Did ***Magneto*** attempt something like this? Or was he too weary, too *heartsick?* Did he believe he *deserved* their cruel attentions?

I *refuse*--***I resist***-- but to them, I am *food*. A *snack*.

Pain.

Recalculating.

The only hope I *have*...

...is to *stick* in their throat.

And did Magneto go through *this?* This pain of *knowledge,* this spiritual *vivisection?* His life flipped through like a *book?*

"Mutant." "Leader." "Queen." "Omega." "Goddess."

So many layers that I have *discovered* in myself, each one waiting beneath the *next...*

...but what am I at the *core?*

What am I *allowed* to be?

I heard the news of Krakoa's fall--*the death of the dream*--and my heart only *hardened.* I could not let it *touch* me, or I would *break.*

I could not fail. So I pretended I did not *feel.*

Now I am entering a place where pretenses and protections are *torn away.*

I came here for ***Max***-- because he was *my friend,* because he is in *pain*--

--but this is not a place anyone can simply *visit.*

Behold the river. Behold the *broken city.* ***Behold judgment.***

Whatever this place has already done to ***Magneto***...

...it will do worse to me.

Resurrection of Magneto #1 Foil Variant

by David Baldeón
& Israel Silva

The Weight of the World

37

Fraud.

Liar.

Thief of life.

Do you have any idea what you've done?

I do.

I do *now.*

But I am taking refuge for a moment in *memory*-- of a time when I did not.

When I was *deluded*... wrapped in the illusions of the living...

I recall entering the *deep ocean*, with **Namor** at my side...an *adventure* as payment for a small plot of land.

We opened a door into the dark. Fought a great beast. Played a game against *sea witches*.

In making his move, Namor had chosen *poorly*...

Gkk--

I had chosen wisely.

In *this*, at least.

Do you care at all what this does?

Release my *companion*, please.

Pfft! Let him suffocate. He is *nothing* in this place. ***A petty king of the shallows...***

Even so, a ***promise*** was made--*his life for a better choice*. And I did ***win your game...***

You *did* win.

But have you made better choices?

Ah well. Breathe again, petty king.

And say "thank you" to your rescuer...

Pffaahh!

Foul hag--

He's giving me an island. That's thanks enough.

What does this do...?

It remains with you.

Once you have it, you can never lose it, even in death--until the day it is turned.

All the same, keep guard of it--for it is the key to the door of judgment and purification.

...

The door out? Or the door in?

Turn it and see.

I did not. I placed that key in a pocket and never touched it more.

But I still have it now. I feel its metal.

I feel its weight.

I am in the place of judgment now. But I have not turned that key.

And no matter the punishment--no matter what I have *earned*--

--I will not.

I will not *compromise* for mere *discomfort.*

"As a boy, I turned my back on God forever." I told Ororo that once.

I could no longer believe in any power that could fail my family, my people. That would allow death and horror on such a scale.

And with nothing to pray to, I swore to *myself*--that if I had the power, if I only had a *chance*, I would not fail.

BETHANY VALDEZ
MICHAEL COLUMBUS
AMIR [illegible]LARD
JAV[illegible]ERRY
SA[illegible]BU[illegible]
[illegible]DAI[illegible]ED

I failed many times. I failed loved ones and friends and strangers. I failed my *child*.

But then, after many years... *Krakoa*. **Hope**. A dream made *real*--a dream I could hold, that I could **believe**. A *return* from death...

Could it lessen my *guilt?*

AVERIE BOOTH
DOUGLAS RAMSEY
AR[illegible]ASS

Is the World To Come a *place* or a *time?* Am I *truly* beyond death or simply caught in some spell my *daughter Wanda* cast? Some *other* room of waiting?*

*See Trial Of Magneto (2022).

As a boy, I was taught that how I lived my *life* should be the focus. That what came *after* was in the hands of God.

But as a boy, I turned my back on God.

I told *Ororo* that once.

...

Leave me.

Before she says a word, she summons a fall of *snow* to cool the air. *Compassion*--always her deepest instinct.

It's a welcome gesture, though I long ago tuned out the *heat*, the *sound*...

...all but the names.

SUZANNA DANE

When my friends call out to me, I come. You *called*, Max. I felt your *pain*--I had to *answer* it. To *save* you, if I can.

I had no *choice*.

What are you doing?

Christopher Bach.

A mutant hater with a scheme to make people *afraid* of me, as if they weren't already. Many died. I've counted *their* names.

In the end, I dropped a few tons of rubble on him and his followers. And when Cyclops asked what became of him, I *lied*. Said I didn't know.

I regret the *lie*...

Max.

There are *thousands* of names on this wall alone. Dozens of *walls* in this...*city of judgment.*

Did they *all* die at your hand...?

By my hand or in my name. By action or inaction. By intent or by accident.

Those I *regret*. Those I *don't*.

They all *count*, Ororo...

...and they must all be counted.

I've been here for some time. I've read almost every name.

My choice-- to acknowledge the *full weight* of Magneto upon the world. The blood that I simply *accepted.*

To save one life is to save the world, my teachers said.

Now you *see* this-- my ***great work***--

--do you honestly think I should *return* to the world?

Have I not done enough?

I came because I felt your *pain*--

If I am in pain, it is *my* pain! It was ***my life!***

And who will judge how I lived it if I *do not?*

Leave me, Ororo.

Or you may add another name to the tally.

Are you *threatening* me...?

I am *trying* to protect the life you *still have*. But mine is *over*--and the *cost* of it is *all* but *counted*.

So I am *done* with life--done with *you*--

--and I am done with the world!

The world is not done with *us*. But...if this is truly what you *want*...

...I'm *sorry*.

I know Krakoa couldn't bring your *daughter* back to you--

Anya.

Yes, that *last* failure was my *final straw*... but the *truth*, Ororo?

The great *Magneto, hero of Krakoa?*

He was *already* broken.

You were *there*, Ororo. You had a seat at that table--*you remember how it went.*

"We were *children*, playing a game of nation-building.

"To appease *Charles'* sense of right and wrong, I suggested a ***nation of laws***--and we *spoke* of those laws *in high and poetic cadence*--

"--and thus, made three laws that cared more for *poetry* than *people*.

"And in my *hubris*, I *enforced* those unenforceable laws.

"I stood in front of my fellow mutants and *condemned* them to exile in the Pit--as if they were of a piece with ***Victor Creed***, *brutal inconveniences* to be *wished away...**

"That cruelty alone earned me all of this."

*See Sabretooth (2022).

Not just you.

When ***Vulcan*** returned, I chose to *bury* him--*no thrones on Arakko*, but I built my own Pit.

Our sins belong to us *all*.

Even so--at that point, I could lie to myself that there was justice in the systems I helped create. That those I condemned had done things worth condemning.

But then...

"...came the end of that lie."

I did this for you, Magneto!

The *Toad*-- the man I once *hated* for his slavish weakness, even as I let him twist himself into *my weapon.*

The *missing piece* of Wanda's Waiting Room.

The *scapegoat* who took the blame for her *murder.*

Wanda would never have agreed ahead of time. But *Mortimer* did. Deep down, he still *loved* her--and he still followed *me.*

I must judge myself, Ororo. Was I not the judge of a *nation?*

Before that, did I not judge *all humanity* and find it wanting?

Shall not the judge of all the world do right?

Do you still feel my *pain*, Ororo?

Do you still want me *back?*

...

I think that what I *want*...is to speak to ***Wanda.***

Don't you **dare** put it on her! **The fault is mine!**

All Wanda could do once I set things in motion was ***risk the Waiting Room's existence!***

Thunderbird and ***thousands like him*** are ***alive***-- from *her* work, from *Toad's* ***sacrifice***--

Such a *spirited* defense--once the focus is off ***you.*** You're closer to ***Charles*** than you care to *admit*, Max.

You *use* people for *your ends*, play the *martyr* when it doesn't work out--and when your decisions ***destroy you***, you *wallow* instead of--

Wait.

Did something happen to Charles?

...

Something happened to *all of us.*

And she tells me.

She tells me *everything.*

How Orchis finally came for us. How we *died.* How *Charles* was offered his *choice.*

How--*in the No-Place of his heart*--he felt he had *none.* How he *martyred us all...*

...just as I predicted.

I told you.

I told you to *watch* him.

I told you to watch him!

My heart is molten steel. The rage consumes me.

I came here *willingly*. I climbed the Tower. I stood in the gaze of Dominions. As I was judge, so I undertook my own judgment.

How quickly I forget that. How *easily* I become the stern judge *again*...

...to hurl my own crimes at the one I committed the crime of *trusting*.

Of course. I etched these names with every life that my life ended. *They are mine to tear down.*

The task is mine to abandon.

I reach for a name.

Sharon Friedlander.

SHARON FRIEDLANDER

An *ally* of mutantkind, killed by *Joanna Cargill*--because she thought it was what I would *want*. Had I given her reason to *doubt* it?

Can I be forgiven?

No.

I reach for a name.

Ilya Popov.

On the *Leningrad* when it attacked me. I sent it to the *seafloor*--to make my *point*. His first voyage. He was 19.

ILYA POPOV

Can I be forgiven?

Never.

I reach for a name.

Faina Moroz.

A witness at the back of the crowd when Anya died. She froze in fear, wept, felt helpless--then a tide of magnetic force took her life.

FAINA MOROZ

Can I be forgiven?

I refuse forgiveness.

I reach for a--

Oh.

I cannot be forgiven.

I cannot forgive myself.

Yet I count.

MAX EISENHARDT

And I am counted.

Charles...Charles, you saw in me what counted. What I could not see in *myself*. And how did I *repay* you?

After I failed *you* so many times? *After all the years between us?*

When I saw you *fumbling, teetering*, when I saw your desperate desire to be loved ***crushing*** you--*what did I do?*

What did I do, Charles?

I could have *stayed*. Given Krakoa a *chance*--tried to make it *better*, make *myself* better, reach *further*, do *more*, ensure our garden grew in *kinder hands*...

But I had endured too much, lost too much. My failures were too great.

I could not believe.

Magneto...

So I chose death over the dream I built with my friend.

Leave me.

No.

There's something you need to see.

That is simply who I am.

I can't. I *can't*, Ororo. I can't see what he saw... I can't see what *you* see...

It's out of our hands...

Nothing is out of our hands.

See.

And here...

...here, *all* I am is counted.

The walls are gleaming marble, and on the marble, there are *names.*

Names etched by my hand or in my name. By action or inaction. By intent or even by accident.

Even those I *regret*...they are all there.

The name of everyone whose life I ever saved.

NO...

I dare not look. I dare not count them.

There are too few.

Even if they outnumber the dead a *thousand to one*, there are ***too few.***

And yet ***one*** is too many.

Too many to ever turn my back.

And *so many* are hated...so many are *feared*...

Forgive me, Charles.

I was wrong.

We both were... but it's not too late. I swear to you--*it's not too late.*

Hold on, old friend.

Max...?

I'm on my way.

Let's go.

As easy as that.

The *key to resurrection*, won like a *prize in a game--should* it be easy? To return from death, to *retreat* from the sphere of judgment?

That was the greatest promise of Krakoa, of course. *Resurrection on demand, no waiting...*

...so why does this feel like the *last* time?

And why does it feel like the one that *pays for them all?*

Only one way to find out.

I turn the *key*... and a dark door swings *wide*...

KLIK

...beneath our feet.

Not the door to *life*, then.

Not the *easy* path.

This road leads *elsewhere.*

Max?

Where are we?

I have no answer. Only what I *see*-- and *feel*.

Pitch black...

...and very, very cold.

Ha. Ha ha.

Look at you both.

The weather witch, restless and rootless as the breeze. Have you found a home now? Found joy? Found community?

You will turn your back on it, Ororo Munroe. As you turn your back on everything you love... save for the X that does not love you back.

And you. The wounded king, who abandoned the world-- but won't let it go on without him.

Do you really think you can lay your own ghost to rest, Max? Or is it Erik? Or Magnus?

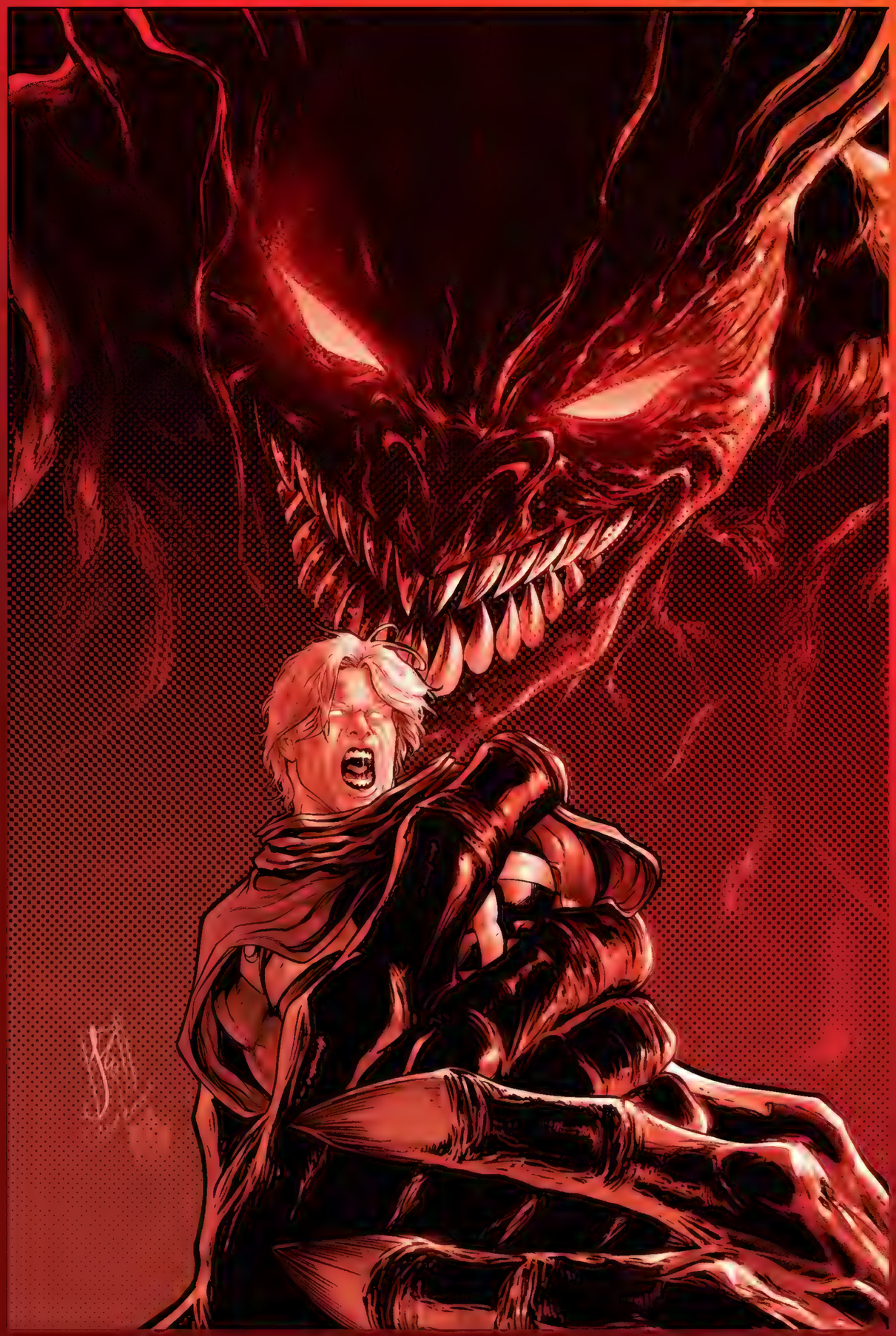
Can you shed your crimes as simply as you shed your many names?

Oh, my dear Magneto.

You might as well fight your own shadow.

Resurrection of Magneto #2 Variant

by Phil Jimenez
& Edgar Delgado



Falls the Shadow

37

Somewhere in the dark, cold underneath of everything--*somewhere just behind me*--is a face.

It is vast and gold and pitiless. It is the face of *death*--for *worlds* and for *spirits*.

The face of Annihilation.

Ororo.

Did you honestly think we were *done*?

The space around me grows *darker and colder.* I reach, instinctively, for warmer climate.

But the breeze that blows in my face is noxious and foul.

Corrupted.

Where did you take ***Max...?***

Far away. Answer the question, Ororo.

Yes, I thought we were done.

I *ended* you when we ended the ***Genesis War--***

You melted some *gold.* Destroyed a shape I'd taken. Cut me off from *physical space.*

To end me...*is more difficult.*

So you say.

When we arrived, *another* spoke to me--an ***essence of evil*** the X-Men know well.

A being who has possessed *many* poor souls to ruin many *lives...* who may wear *your* golden face now.

We knew him as the ***Shadow King.***

So Annihilation was truly a *mask?* Or the Shadow King is the *facet* of Annihilation?

Perhaps you're thinking too *small,* Wind-Rider.

...Perhaps we are *legion.*

Each with our own *name* and *role*, yet each *aligned.*

Perhaps you've battled us many times, in many borrowed guises.

Perhaps you battle us *every day of your life.*

And on into the future. An *endless war.*

And so I ask *again*, Ororo.

Are we done...?

No.

No, we're never done.

No hesitation at all.

Be honest with me, Erik.

She'd have made a great evil mutant, wouldn't she?

Frankly, I doubt she'd have put up with me.

And you can drop this...*facade* you've put on, Shadow King.

I find it *insulting*. Charles deserves better than to *speak* your lines...

Oh? Are you telling me--with all you've learned--that there is no shadow in Charles Xavier?

Do you believe that, Erik?

He's a good man.

And we must beware of good men, mustn't we? Charles, most of all.

Is that why you named your opposing force the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants...?

I've explained that a *hundred* times. The *oppressor* applies the label--the *libel*--to the *oppressed*.

We are evil for *existing*, and thus all *other* evils they can imagine must apply.

I was making a point.

Yes, you're always making points. It's always so much more subtle than simply wanting to create fear.

Isn't it, Erik?

Stop calling me that!

You're not Charles--

You met him as Erik Lehnsherr, so that's how he thinks of you...but you're going by Max now, aren't you?

Your attempt to finally drop all the masks...

...only there's one mask left, isn't there?

Tell the truth. However much you'd like to be Max again... what's your true name?

What's the name in your heart?

...

Magneto.

MAGNETO!

THE HUMAN RACE NO LONGER DESERVES DOMINION OVER PLANET EARTH!

THE DAY OF THE *MUTANTS* IS UPON US!

AND THE FIRST PHASE OF MY PLAN WILL BE TO SHOW MY *POWER*... TO MAKE *HOMO SAPIENS* BOW...

....TO HOMO SUPERIOR!

Homo superior.

Goddess.

Omega.

All these have I been called.

And more...all these have I *answered* to.

Now I must *back up* such easy talk.

Look at you, Ororo. Whose name means beauty.

So powerful. So perfect...

Kurt told me about this one--the ***First Fallen.***

The *primal opposite* to the *Phoenix*, according to the Watcher. For the Phoenix is ***death and rebirth--***

...don't ever change.

--and the *Fallen* can only be ***stagnation.***

Is *that* who I am?

Beautiful *perfection?*

The *Omega's Omega*, the *Goddess on her throne?*

Never *failing?* Never *permitted* to fail?

Am I to be allowed no flaw?

NO!

I will *not* be ***caged***, demon-- not by *you* nor ***anyone else!***

Really? Not even yourself?

Will you have any other choice?

You wouldn't listen in your own reality. But now... you're in my house.

Now it's just *you*...

...and *me*.

Nnnm--

And it's *my* turn to speak.

I *misread* you, last time we spoke. You *couldn't* listen then--your responsibilities would not *permit* it.

And you are ***addicted*** to responsibility--flitting from one to another like a *butterfly*, like a *magician spinning plates*.

Can Arakko be free if *you* aren't there to free it? Can Earth have a voice in the galaxy if *you* aren't there to voice it?

Is evil ever fought if *you* aren't fighting it?

Can the world go on without Ororo Munroe?

KKAAHH!

How many times have you saved the world, Ororo?

How often have the X-Men saved the universe only because you were there...?

Enough of this *mockery*, Shadow King. Every shape you borrow is an *insult*--to me or to others. Take your *own* and be *done*.

Or are you claiming to be *every demon the X-Men ever fought...?*

I can't claim that. We're all ourselves here, even if we're also... something else.

But a *light casts* many shadows *in* many shapes--*and shadow is shadow.*

Box the world into categories--so simple, so controlled--and you're choosing a neat lie over a messy truth.

And that path leads to my territory, 'Ro. Remember how I tricked you? Forge does.

And look at your buddy... whatshisname.

"Max."

Now there's a man who sees in categories.

...

I see you.

REMEMBER, WE ARE *HOMO SUPERIOR!* WE ARE BORN TO *RULE THE EARTH!* THE HUMANS MUST BE OUR SLAVES!

THEY ARE OUR NATURAL ENEMIES-- AND TOGETHER, WITH OUR SUPERHUMAN POWERS, WE CAN CONQUER THEM *ALL*--

Enough.

No need to shame me further with *my own ill-considered words...*

YOU *DARE* SAY THAT IN *MY* PRESENCE?! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THAT OUR PERSONAL FEELINGS ARE *NOTHING?!*

IT IS THE *PLAN* THAT IS ALL-IMPORTANT!!!

Ah yes. The *plan.* My great *scheme,* to give humanity a *single target* to focus on...*

OF *COURSE!* HUMANS ARE LIKE SHEEP! THEY RESPOND TO CERTAIN STIMULI--

--AND *FEAR* IS ONE OF THE MOST POTENT!

**As relayed in the recent MAGNETO #1-4.*

Yes. I remember telling myself *exactly that*--that Charles' ***carrots*** would not tempt the humans to *justice* without an opposing ***stick***.

Magneto would be the ***iron rod*** to beat *sense* into the humans--and, *if it became necessary*, into ***Charles and his students***.

How *quickly* it became necessary, *hmm?*

WHY??? WHY DO YOU FIGHT US???

FOR YOU ***TOO*** ARE A MUTANT!!!

Charles once told me that humans and mutants could create a *golden age on Earth*--if we could only work ***side by side***.

I forget my *exact* response to that *particular* utopian notion--but I suspect *you* remember...

NEVER! THE HUMANS MUST BE OUR ***SLAVES!*** THEY ARE NOT ***WORTHY*** TO SHARE DOMINION OF EARTH WITH US!

YOU HAVE ***MADE*** YOUR CHOICE-- FOREVERMORE, WE ARE MORTAL FOES!

Yes, I made a choice. I chose to *reject* Charles--and later, to reject *you*.

But to live is to *learn*...and, perhaps, having learned, to choose *again*.

I see you, Magneto.

And there is *still* a place for us in the broken land.

WHAT IS THIS...?

I do not *deny* you. I will not *ignore* you. You are *a part of me*--perhaps the most ***foundational*** part.

You are my rage--my *justified anger* in response to the monstrous crimes against me and mine.

Should I *forgive* those evils? *Should I forget?* Remember only my daughter's *laugh*, never her *final screams?*

So I am told. *So I am often told...*

But if I *cannot* forgive--*not even myself*--***where does that leave us?***

Throughout my life, I have *repressed* the rage in me until it *exploded*, or I have given it *free rein* over all decision.

But I cannot *return to the world* and *return to the same path.* I must ***change.***

We...must ***evolve.***

So I acknowledge *all I have done.* I admit *all that I am.* ***I own the shadow that is in me.***

And if this is *the engine that drives me--let it drive me to a better world.*

A world for ALL who are hated and feared.

WE'LL SEE.

So, what now?

Do we come to an agreement?

I've said my piece.

You could accept me-- acknowledge that I am simply part of the human heart. Go your way and allow me to work in the world.

Or you could do what the Cosmos allowed you on this journey to do--defend it--by rejecting me and doing battle.

Forces are in motion, Ororo. It's a very good time to take me out of the picture--shift the balance in favor of my opposite number.

Well, 'Ro? Do you stick or twist?

He presents the decision as a binary. *Two categories.* But *that*, of course, is one of his *traps.*

I *must* accept him-- acknowledge his part in the *tapestry of existence.* Respect that he is as he is according to his *role*...

...so I can *fight him with every drop of my blood.*

For the shadows in us *must be seen*, in order to be truly ***beaten***...

...and evil is never fought if ***someone*** isn't fighting it.

That's the spirit, 'Ro. Who else *has the power*-- *the will*--to take me on?

Who can free your people? Who will save the world? You, Ororo Munroe. The Goddess who never fails.

You alone.

Alone...?

And suddenly, I see the *last* trap.

A *subtle* one, and expertly baited.

Me *alone*. As alone as I came here.

As if I had *no other choice*. As if it was somehow *dishonorable* to do otherwise.

As if ***teamwork, solidarity, friendship, love***...were somehow ***weaknesses***.

Perhaps they are.

To a *demon*.

But I am an ***X-Man***, King of Shadow.

We're never alone.

In a heartbeat, Max is at my side--joining my fight. *How could it be otherwise?*

Instinctively, he knows what must be done. But then, we've done it *before*...on **Arakko**.

Pooled our powers--fed my life force to him--in a single attack. A *perfect mutant circuit.*

Even in this place beyond death, we can give *our lives*--against the great **enemy of life.**

The Shadow King, fearful and furious at the failure of his trick, tries to *break the link*...

...but the energies have built *too far* now--and they are only building *further.* Back and forth, taking *more of me* with every pass...

And when the storm *breaks*...

...comes the moment of release.

The Shadow King screams.

Ororo!

There is no pain.

Ororo...

Is it done?

Is he... *gone...?*

I almost laugh. The shadow is *never* truly gone...but it can be robbed of its *power*, at least for a time.

The Cosmos' mission for me is *fulfilled*-- and my own likewise. But there was always going to be a *price*...

Stay with me.

I came here alive... and that was our weapon. *My life.*

But *you*... you still have a way back.

Turn your key again. *Return to the world.*

Fight for it.

...No.

Not at this cost.

Not at the cost of *one more innocent life!* Human or mutant--***not one more!***

Not while ***I*** have the power to say *no!*

Don't...be absurd...

It's out of our--

NOTHING IS OUT OF OUR HANDS!

His anger *overflows*, like the Magneto who was...channeled like *molten iron* into *new paths.*

Into the Magneto who ***will be.***

If ***I*** can draw on *your life,* Ororo--you can draw on mine! ***I give it freely!***

I have the power--

I AM POWER!

Take it--

--and call it forth!

Now...*now* there is pain.

And the pain is endless.

It hurts to live. It hurts to return to the world.

Just to be in the world...*it can hurt so much...*

Again!

...this world of hate and fear.

But it is still *our* world.

All of us.

KRZZT

It is *life.*

And *oh, bright lady*...I have ***missed*** it.

Clear!

HER HEART BEATS *AGAIN*-- "*STRONG AND STEADY*"!!!

Adam *Brashear*...?

Glad you're back *with* us, Ororo. You gave me quite a scare.

Mind telling me what you were ***thinking?***

That you don't...*cheat death*...by playing it ***safe.***

We *did* it, Adam.

Look.

A distant key turns in a distant lock. The passage *out* of shadow or the way in?

The portal-- ***someone's coming through!***

Who...?

But he already knows.

The portal gate *screams* as matter is torn from the energy beyond, spinning *flesh, bone and blood--new* and yet somehow the *original.*

Who am I?

I am power.

Men call me *Magneto.*

Resurrection of Magneto #4 Variant by Alex Maleev

Reawakening

38

It's strange.

I don't know which ***hat*** to wear.

The memory of my post-death experience already feels like a ***dream***.

I woke from it to *portal energy* on my skin instead of the yolk of a *golden egg*...to *ocean blue* instead of Krakoa's *green* or Arakko's *red*...

...to the queasy understanding that ***everything had changed***.

Ororo told me in *words*--about Krakoa's fall and *all that had happened since*...about **Charles**...

(And why can't I face Charles?)

...but I *insisted* on seeing it *with my own eyes*...and on ***wasting no time.***

So, as the resistance mobilizes, I am ***here***--at the *closest Orchis facility*, resting on the ocean's *surface.*

Magneto!

I'm telling you, we got ***Magneto*** here! I need *reinforcements*--

A mutant ***prison***. A ***gulag***. A ***torture chamber.***

I turned my back on the world, and in my absence...the world did ***this.***

Stay down.

Unnh!

My rage *burns*...

KRAK

...yet I find myself *holding back.*

Where are the damn ***Stark Sentinels*** when we need them...?

Avoiding ***fatalities.***

The commander's jaw isn't even broken.

We *don't* need them! They're sending ***Squad Zero!***

The mutie's about to learn what *real* power is--

Let's fix that.

Aarrgh!

WHAM

And then...let's do something about all these annoying *bullets.*

Why hold back?

NO--

Because even among the powerful, ***I am power.*** And power carries weight. Power makes *ripples* in the world.

My action. My inaction. My conscious example. My unwitting inspiration.

Please.

Don't kill me.

I help, I harm. I save life, I end it.

What *should* my choice be? What is my ***responsibility?***

KRAK

WHOK

Which hat should I wear?

Which Magneto will I be?

And is it truly up to *me?*

Translocation complete. ***Squad Zero has been deployed.***

That means this battle's already *over,* mutie.

Strange *electromagnetic energies* are at play around them--and in their very ***bodies***. Some *weapon* against me or against ***Lorna***...

Anger tells me to strike them down *before they do the same to me...*

...but *instinct* tells me to wait. And to pull my magnetic field in ***tight.***

What's the matter? Don't you wanna take *these* guns away?

Ha! He's ***scared,*** Sarge!

This is gonna be a *turkey shoot!*

BOOM

Very tight.

I catch the bullet *precisely*, half an inch from my skull--*no more*. I understand the ***trap*** now. I must be ***careful***.

Those magnetic fields aren't *weapons*...but ***sensors***.

Their *weapon* is their ***cruelty***.

What's the *matter*, Mags? ***C'mon!*** You're the *new god*, ain'tcha? ***Smite me*** already!

Strike me down!

Reckon he's *wise*, Sarge.

That *true*, Mags? You *guessed?* Why don't we *spell it out*, then?

Attention, muties! These *suits* detect changes to ***local magnetic fields!*** They are ***veeery sensitive!***

And if any *fancy magnetic* powers touch them-- ***nerve gas*** is gonna ***flood*** this little roach motel!

First, ten of you die! Then a *hundred!* Then a ***thousand--***

God help us...

It's okay. It'll be *okay.*

He's *Magneto.*

He's *back.*

There's your choice, Mags. Either you *die* for your adoring fans--*executed for crimes against humanity*--

--or you *kill* them while ***trying*** to kill us.

Hope you pick the *second* one.

The perfect trap.

A way to *counter* me without requiring *costly nonmagnetic materials*--only ***callousness***, which Orchis have a *plentiful supply* of.

Storm and ***Blue Marvel*** are close by...but I can't signal them without triggering the *sensors*.

I must craft my *own* response.

How would the Magneto of *old* react? Unthinking *rage?* Single-minded *vengeance* at any cost--even these ***innocent lives?***

I'd *like* to say otherwise...but I find myself *uncertain*.

And what would ***Charles*** do? *Embrace self-sacrifice?* Fall *nobly* upon the *offered sword?*

Of course, now he knows how Orchis keep *their* end of such bargains.

But these are hypotheticals. In the *here and now*, I see only one way to proceed.

My way.

Tripping the sensors will send an electrical impulse down a wire to a circuit--almost instantaneously.

Almost.

This move will require *confidence and strength*--an experienced mind in a vital body. It *won't* require *finesse*...but anything that did would be ***too slow.***

I'll have to remember their names.

There is the sudden sound of every metal component inside the suits--every *wire*, every *circuit*--crushing down into five small, dense cores.

The process *ignores* the five bodies inside the suits. The sound is **wet.**

Unlike electricity in a wire, mutant power *is* instantaneous. The thing is done so quickly that no signal escapes, no gas is triggered.

And yet... it *was* the perfect trap.

With *no way out.*

Neither white nor black, then.

He *did* it!

Magneto *did it*--

The *hope* in their voices.

That's what almost breaks me.

I must be so *careful* with that hope.

WRUNCH

Now I have *truly* returned to the world. Turned to *face* it--to act *in* it and *upon* it. And *already*, my actions have taken lives and saved them.

To save one life is to save the world, my teachers said.

They look at me with such expectation. Which Magneto am I? *Their* Magneto.

And what do they see? Their *hero?* The man on the *T-shirt?* The man who is *right?*

A *good man...?*

I will *try*. Try *again*.

It is all I can do.

And yet I fear it.

To me, my friends.

We must be *so wary* of good men. *For what will we not do?*

What will *I* not do?

I fear it.

Outside, we regroup.

Ororo and *Adam* have done their part. Between us, we've rescued almost a *thousand* caged mutants.

Though the *other two* took more Orchis prisoners...

Evacuees *this way*, please. This will take you to my *headquarters*--from there, ***Taala*** can portal you back to your loved ones.

Unless you're ***Orchis***--in which case, I have a *detention level* waiting for you. You'll find it more humane than *yours*.

Is that *everyone?*

...

Everyone who *survived.*

I dance all too easily around the obvious.

But *she* knows...and the unspoken question hangs in the air.

What will I not do?

I fear the *answer*... is *change.*

Evacuation *complete*--and I've strip-mined all data from their systems.

Would one of *you* like the pleasure...?

I will.

It's no effort at all.

More of a *relief.*

The gulag platform folds like *origami.* A *billion-dollar installation,* crushed instantly into *scrap.*

As I twist even the smallest fragments beyond all possible repair, I allow myself a moment of *peace...*

MUTANTS DETECTED.

...but such moments are always short-lived.

ENGAGE AND DESTROY.

Stark Sentinel. The most *advanced* mutant killer yet.

Another *job well done,* Tony...

Dr. Brashear has a long-standing *distrust* of the Avengers. In that, he and I *are much alike.*

But this is not *Stark's* creation. ***Orchis*** stole *everything he had,* including his *name*--and his *darkest thoughts.*

They were built to withstand *your* magnetic power, Max.

But they've yet to face me.

Lethal technology he invented and kept in *reserve*--in case he needed it against ***me***. And did I not *desire* that?

Did I not want him to fear me?

How many have these machines *killed,* I wonder?

*LOCAL AIR PRESSURE INCREASING SIGNIFICANTLY. MUTANT DETECTED: **ORORO MUNROE.***

*DEPLOYING **COUNTERMEASURE.***

How many dead in *my name?*

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

Aaarrghh!

The sonic weapon is directed at *Storm*--but even from *here*, it's an earsplitting, ever-changing *cacophony*.

Ororo is one of the most *powerful mutants alive*--but her *ears* are very human.

Clever, machine. But if you're aiming that at *her*, you can't aim it at *me*.

And I'm betting *I'm* not in your database--

ASSUMPTION: FALSE.

HUMAN MUTATE DETECTED: ADAM BRASHEAR.

DEPLOYING COUNTERMEASURES.

Dammit-- *nnhh*--

That's-- *neutronium radiation*--

--or something close enough to *blunt my attacks.*

Still, we've *done* what we came to do...

Guerrilla tactics, then--fight and run.

It makes *sense*... but part of me *wishes it did not.*

Be careful what you wish for.

Magneto?

It's *Magneto!* He's *alive!*

UNAUTHORIZED HUMANS DETECTED.

PREPARING COUNTERMEASURES.

At first glance, they seem like fishermen blown off course. Then I spot the *sign*--and the *cameras*.

These are *activists*--***citizen journalists.*** Somehow, they *found out* about the Orchis facility here. They've come to *expose* it.

MUTANT LIBERATION NOW!

Countermeasures...?

Probably a bluff. We're *baseline humans*--hurting us is against its *rules*...

But in his voice, he knows.

No *privilege* is ever granted by an oppressor that cannot be *stripped away*. No *rules* that cannot be simply ***ignored.***

Stop the engines! We're going to try to *evacuate* you--

There's no time.

This ***weapon***--ostensibly built to *protect* humans from me--will instead ***kill them all.***

While I... what?

Call it *irony?*

Call it ***poetic justice*** for human crimes?

WRUNCH

Turn my back?

"What will I not do?" I asked myself.

WRUNCH

I have my answer.

ALL RESISTANCE WILL BE TERMINATED.

REMINDER: THIS UNIT IS PROOFED AGAINST MAGNETIC TAMPERING--

WHUIVNG

And against *this?*

And *this?*

KRANNG

IMPACT: INSUFFICIENT.

THIS UNIT IS BUILT TO WITHSTAND THE MOST POWERFUL MUTANT ATTACK--

And the bark of an oak is built to withstand a *piece of straw...*

...but a *hurricane wind* will blow the straw *through* the bark and *deep into the wood.*

Monster... ***we are the hurricane.***

And I am not *alone* in it.

ERROR! OCULAR SENSORS DETECT LOGICAL IMPOSSIBILITY!

SONIC COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST ORORO MUNROE REMAIN IN EFFECT--

So do I.

And unlike a *crude machine*, I don't need to mount a *direct attack* to be effective.

Sound is just *molecular motion*. Disrupt that motion with a subtle ***antimatter field*** around Ororo...and your sonics aren't *quite* so sonic.

Human and mutant powers in *strategic combination*. Charles would call it *inspirational*...

...but I think I can take it *further*.

I steal some *conductive metal* from the giant fists I've been throwing at the Sentinel--and form what I need.

Ororo. Adam. ***To me.***

We're going to make a ***human/mutant circuit.***

This will require *absolute trust*-- in *both* of them.

What *kind* of circuit...?

What else? An ***electromagnet.***

Call it a new *spin* on an *old trick*...

Max--if this goes wrong, it could ***kill you***--

Haven't you heard?

I'm not afraid of a life that ends.

Ororo calls the fundamental force of *lightning*--and, as she did in the *Shadow Kingdom* and on *Arakko*, uses it to *boost my power.*

But this time, ***Adam*** is there to regulate the power and *feed it back.* So there is no *release*, only a constant *redirection*--***through me.***

The energy flow is *unrelenting.* The pain is *unimaginable.*

So is my rage.

I cannot touch the Sentinel *magnetically.* I cannot peel it open with my mind.

All I can do is ***hit it...***

...and hit it...

...and hit it...

...until the false face *falls away.*

Revealing what Orchis *made.* What they may have fed the *entire world* to, in service of their hatred.

The living form of fascism's *ultimate lie*--that there is anything *underneath* the facade of strength but a *hollow shell of wires,* holding up a *puppet.*

That there can be *any* strength in forsaking *common humanity.*

And as the release *comes*--as my friends send *all their power* into that unblinking, lifeless *electric eye*--

--does the eye accuse *me,* Charles?

Do you?

No.

I only accuse *myself.*

Once, I set myself apart from the world, on a place above it and above all the people in it.

Homo superior, I called myself. And I played judge and jury for human and mutant alike in my clean white cape.

And when the world I helped to build was no longer to my *liking*--*too much pain, too many compromises*--I chose to wash my hands of it and walk away.

I was wrong.

And now I must make amends.

Let this be a beginning.

Now its defenses are down...there are a few magnetic pieces in there.

Studying these might provide some clue to their *weaknesses*...

Could be. Before we work on *that* though--let's get our friends in the boat somewhere safe.

Destroying *one* Stark Sentinel nearly killed you all over *again*--I'm not sure I want to face ***five at once***...

Nnh!

Ororo? Something wrong?

A *very* strong telepathic signal--relayed to *me*, since Magneto has his helmet on.

From ***Emma Frost***.

She says she's glad you're *back*... and she needs you to rescue her ***husband***.

Up for saving the man who *invented* the tech we just fought?

Now, that *is* ironic.

But...I can hardly ***turn my back***, Ororo. After all...

...to save one life is to save the world.

Let's go.

Get the full story of the X-Men's battle against Orchis, and the final fate of Krakoa, in the ***Fall of the House of X/Rise of the Powers of X Omnibus Hardcover!***

The Man with No Shame

V

Port Prometheus, Arakko.

So, *this* is how things are done on *Earth*...?

What can I say, Kobak? We like to have fun.

You really never had *anything* like this on Arakko before?

In the great sieges, who a mutant *loved* was less important than how they could *fight*, Robert Drake.

There was little time for *celebration*...

Pride's *more* than a celebration--it's a *protest*. And there is a *lot* to protest right now.

But also...I guess it's a time for *affirmation*. A time to say "*this is who I am, and I'm not going to be ashamed about it*"--

Well, I'll drink to that.

What?

Was I not *invited*?

"THE MAN WITH NO SHAME"

You can drink where you please, Solem Silver-Hide-- but the ***Red Lagoon*** has become dear to me.

So if you make ***trouble*** here...

Ah! My reputation precedes me.

But seeing these celebrations in this place...hearing this talk of ***pride...***

...well, let me tell you a story about Arakko. A story of the ***season,*** you could say-- and it comes with a ***moral*** too.

Sounds a little ***wholesome...***

It'll be the ***opposite.***

It's not as wholesome as ***your*** story, Kobak Never-Held-- your great, dead ***love,*** who gave his life for ***yours.***

"And I am truly ***sorry*** for that tragedy. I've shared my love with ***many,*** but that doesn't inure me to the sting of loss...or ***betrayal.***

"And while Arakko was never ***Earth***...it wasn't ***quite*** the judgment-free zone you were selling.

Ugh. ***Look*** at him.

Debauched, delinquent, ***degenerate.***

His kind can only bring ***shame...***

"Bracken spoke for his ***wife's*** benefit. And I've been called ***worse***-- haven't we all?

"So I *could* have pretended not to hear.

"Maybe I was tired of the ***hypocrisy*** of Arakko. Sick of watching the first family ***serve*** the enemy we'd ***fought,*** as if nothing had ***changed...***"

Maybe it was ***Bracken's*** hypocrisy in particular. ***He*** was the one who'd ended things between us--not me.

This brave, ***brave*** mutant, so afraid to risk his status as a ***prince consort*** over a mucky dalliance with ***moi*** that he'd deny me before our sweat had ***cooled...***

Why do I suspect that's how it plays out with the people in power on ***Earth*** too?

Ha!

Anyway. For whatever reason, on ***that*** particular day...

"...I simply was. Not. ***Having*** it.

I call that a ***challenge*** by ***insult,*** Bracken.

Yield-- or make ready your ***weapon.***

You can yield-- and I suggest you do. Slink back to your sleazy ***playmates.***

Because I'll be using ***this.***

"A ***Hellblade.*** Not just death, but damnation-- ***that*** was how afraid he was of his own desires.

"Fortunately, I'm not afraid of *mine*. I was planning a *very* wild night...with some very *controlled* substances.

Well, in that case... I'll use *this*.

A *bottle?* We may be in the *drinking dens,* but this will be no minor *tavern brawl,* Solem the Damned...

Even so--have one on me, Bracken.

I insist!

KRSH

Pfftt-- that taste! Like *fire!*

What in Okkara's name...?

NO.

Blightswill...

"Bracken was a *self-regenerator--* with his mutant weapon functioning, he was *unbeatable.* With it blocked by the magical brew...

"...not so much.

Pause for *applause?*

NO?

"Everyone on Arakko knows what came next...

"...*Ora Serrata* invented a law I could be accused of *breaking*, and Bracken's noble *challenge* became a not-so-noble *murder*.

"I was caged in the bottom of the *Tower of Broken Will*. I lived a hundred years in a cell, with no visitors permitted..."

A hundred years in *solitary confinement* ...?

No visitors permitted, I said. *Unpermitted* visitors I had plenty of.

Still, it puts the lie to Kobak's tale of Arakkii *tolerance*...

All I said was that how we *fought* was more important than how we *loved*--

And yet I was supposed to bear Bracken's insult with a *smile*? A Hellblade was *fine*, but Blightswill was *cheating*? *Why*?

Why was I seen as so obviously a *cheat*? Why am I such *trouble*?

Is it because I desire *women* as much as *men*--those *outside* binaries as much as those *within* them?

Because my love is *open* and *shared*?

Or is it because--on this planet of *scolds*--I say that how we *love* might be more important than how we *fight*?

No--I say *more*. I say how we love *is* how we fight.

And I will fight the *whole world*...before I feel a single atom of *shame* for it.

Do you *envy* that, Kobak? You, who wears your sadness like a *shroud.*

Or a *shield,* protecting you from having to *feel again...*

Uh, easy, guys--

And what do you desire from this encounter, Solem?

Should I take your example and call your words... a *challenge...?*

Mmmm. Your very *name* is a challenge to me.

If I dared to *hold* the great Never-Held, would I *survive...?*

If the spines that pierce *all* met my *adamantium skin*...would one of us *yield...?*

Or would we both win...?

I am more than my *spines,* Solem. You have *no idea* what I can do.

But you are about to *learn.*

And I look forward to being *taught...*

Um... okay?

So...that's how it's done on *Arakko,* *huh?*

What can I say?

We like to have *fun.*

S.W.O.R.D. #1

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #2

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #3

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #4

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #5

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #6

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #7

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

Cable: Reloaded #1

by Stefano Caselli
& Israel Silva

S.W.O.R.D. #8

by Valerio Schiti
& Marte Gracia

S.W.O.R.D. #9

by Stefano Caselli
& Federico Blee

S.W.O.R.D. #10

by Stefano Caselli
& Java Tartaglia

S.W.O.R.D. #11

by Stefano Caselli
& Federico Blee

X-Men Red #1

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #2

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #3

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #4

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #5

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #6

by Russell Dauterman
& Matt Hollingsworth

X-Men Red #7

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #8

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #9

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #10

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1

by Leinil Francis Yu
& Matt Milla

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #2

by Leinil Francis Yu
& Matt Milla

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #3

by Leinil Francis Yu
& Matt Milla

X-Men Red #11

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #12

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men: Before the Fall — Heralds of Apocalypse #1

by Pepe Larraz & Marte Gracia

X-Men Red #13

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

X-Men Red #14

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

X-Men Red #15

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

X-Men Red #16

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

X-Men Red #17

Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

X-Men Red #18

Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

Resurrection of Magneto #1

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

Resurrection of Magneto #2

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

Resurrection of Magneto #3

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

Resurrection of Magneto #4

by Stefano Caselli
& Jesus Aburtov

Marvel's Voices: X-Men #1

by Bernard Chang
& Marcelo Costa

S.W.O.R.D. #1 Variant

by Terry Dodson
& Rachel Dodson

S.W.O.R.D. #1 Variant

by Ema Lupacchino
& Jordie Bellaire

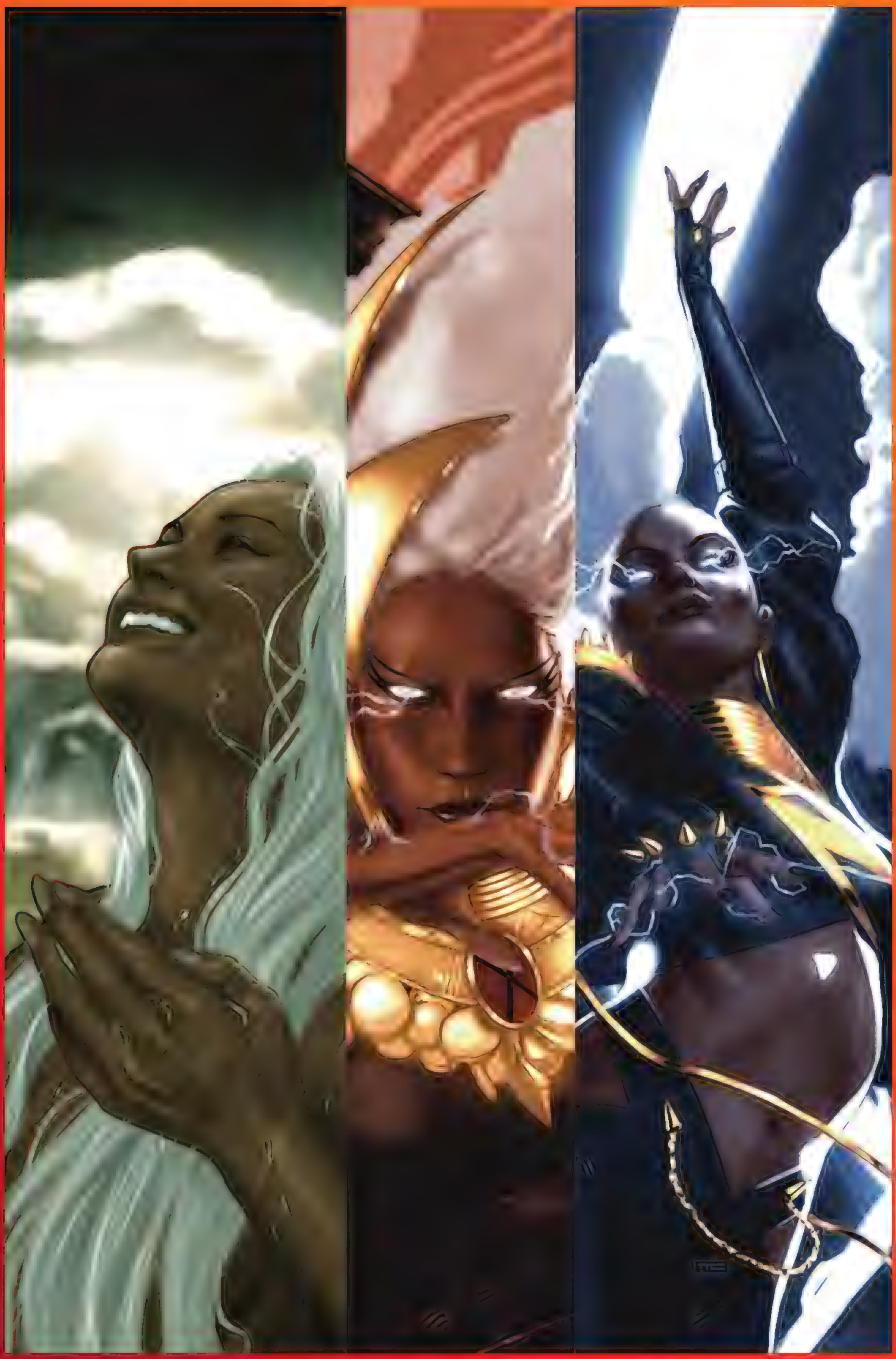
S.W.O.R.D. #5 Variant

by Stefano Caselli
& Federico Blee

S.W.O.R.D. #6 Design Variant by Russell Dauterman

S.W.O.R.D. #6 Design Variant by Valerio Schiti

S.W.O.R.D. #9 Marvel Masterpieces Variant by Joe Jusko



X-Men Red #1 Destiny of X Variant by Taurin Clarke

MARVEL

[dest_]
[_iny_]
[_of_X]

001

EWING
CASELLI
BLEE

X-Men Red #1 Design Variant by Tom Muller

X-Men Red #1 Variant by David Lopez

X-Men Red #1 Variant by Christian Ward

X-Men Red #1 Variant by Peach Momoko

X-Men Red #1 Teaser Variant by Javier Garrón

X-Men Red #3 Variant

by Arthur Adams
& Federico Blee

X-Men Red #3 AAPI Variant

by Dike Ruan
& Neeraj Menon

X-Men Red #4 Hellfire Gala Variant by Jen Bartel

X-Men Red #1 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #2 Arakko Variant

by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #3 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #4 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #5 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #6 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #9 Arakko Variant by Taurin Clarke

X-Men Red #9 Demonized Variant

by Jonboy Meyers

X-Men Red #10 Demonized Variant by InHyuk Lee

MARVEL COMICS GROUP

X-MEN RED

(DETAILS INSIDE)

X-MEN

X-Men Red #10 Classic Homage Variant

by Russell Dauterman
& Matthew Wilson

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1
Women of Marvel Variant

by Elena Casagrande
& Jordie Bellaire

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1
Stormbreakers Variant

by Lucas Werneck

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #2
Women's History Month Variant

by Rickie Yagawa

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #2
Marvel Anatomy Variant

by Jonah Lobe

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #3 Variant

by Joshua “Sway” Swaby

Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1, Nightcrawlers #1 and Immoral X-Men #1 connecting variants

by Phil Noto

Nightcrawlers #2, Immoral X-Men #2 and Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #2 connecting variants

by Todd Nauck & Rachelle Rosenberg

Immoral X-Men #3, Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #3 and Nightcrawlers #3 connecting variants

by Salvador Larroca & Matt Milla

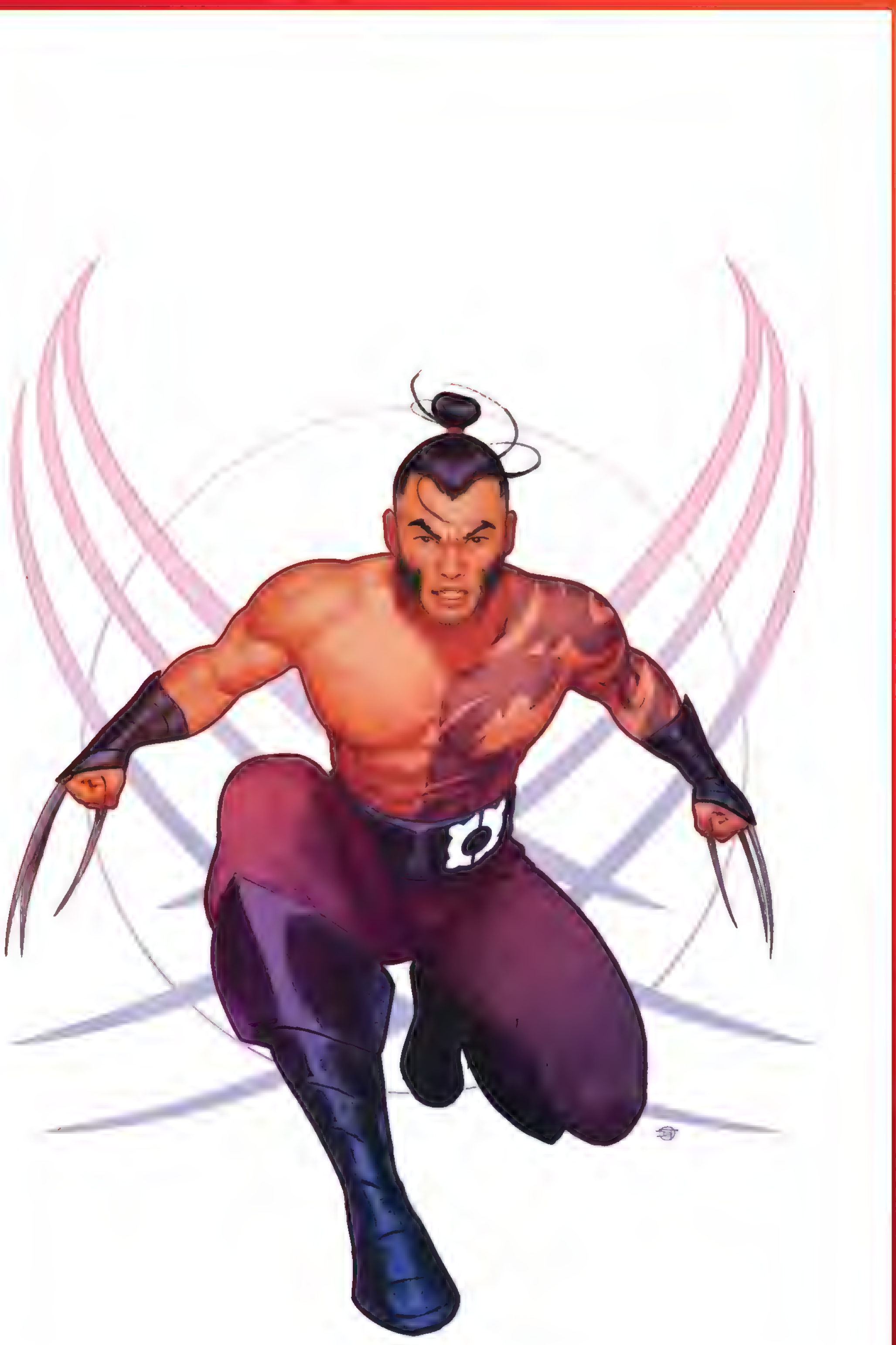
X-Men Red #11 Spider-Verse Variant by Luciano Vecchio

11

MARVEL ICON VARIANT

X-Men Red #11 Marvel Icon Variant

by Stefano Caselli
& Edgar Delgado



X-Men Red #12 Pride Variant by David Talaski

X-Men Red #13 Stormbreakers Variant

by Federico Vicentini
& Federico Blee

X-Men Red #13 Hellfire Gala Variant by Jamie McKelvie

X-Men Red #14 Variant by Mirka Andolfo

X-Men Red #14 Marvel Icon Variant

by Javier Garrón
& Edgar Delgado

X-Men Red #15 Variant by Nicoletta Baldari

X-Men Red #16 X-Men 60th Anniversary Variant by Raymond Gay

X-Men Red #16 Comunidades Variant by Ernanda Souza

X-Men Red #17 X-Men 60th Anniversary Variant by Dike Ruan

X-Men Red #18 Stormbreakers Variant

by Federico Vicentini
& Matt Milla

X-Men Red #18 X-Men 60th Anniversary Variant by Leonel Castellani

Resurrection of Magneto #1 Negative Space Variant

by John Tyler Christopher

Resurrection of Magneto #1 Stormbreakers Variant

by Nic Klein
& Alejandro Sánchez

Resurrection of Magneto #2 X-Men '97 Homage Variant

by Ron Lim & Israel Silva

Resurrection of Magneto #3 Headshot Variant by Mark Brooks

Resurrection of Magneto #3 Headshot Sketch Variant by Mark Brooks

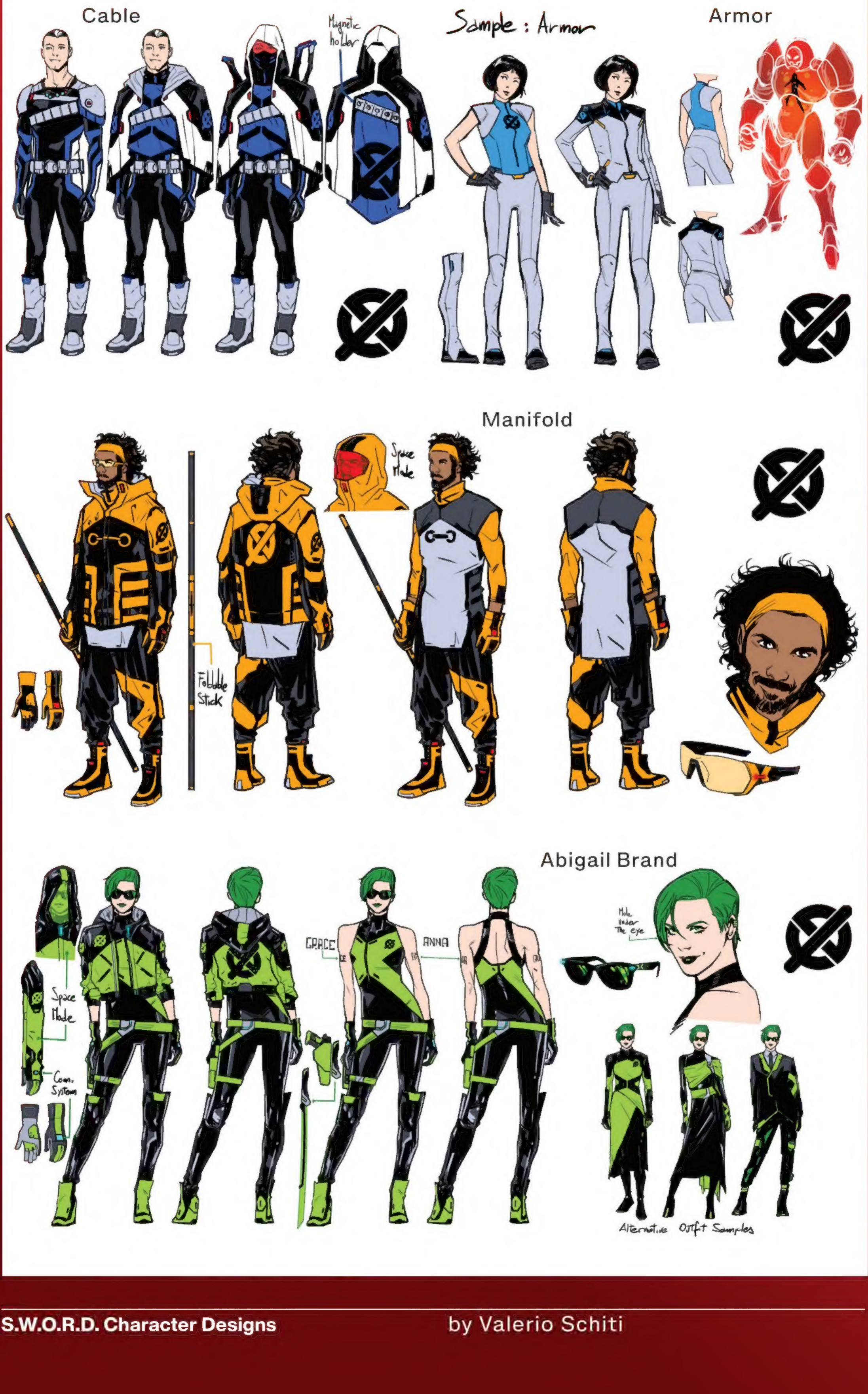
Resurrection of Magneto #3 X-Men '97 Action Figure Variant

Resurrection of Magneto #4 Variant by Felipe Massafera

Marvel's Voices: X-Men #1 Variant

by David Marquez
& Edgar Delgado

Marvel's Voices: X-Men #1 Variant by Nicoletta Baldari



S.W.O.R.D. Character Designs by Valerio Schiti

Frenzy

Peeper

Helmet from here

Risque

Sample : Risque

Display
•stun
•shock
•light
•rope
•sick
Section

Lila Cheney

Sample : Lila Cheney

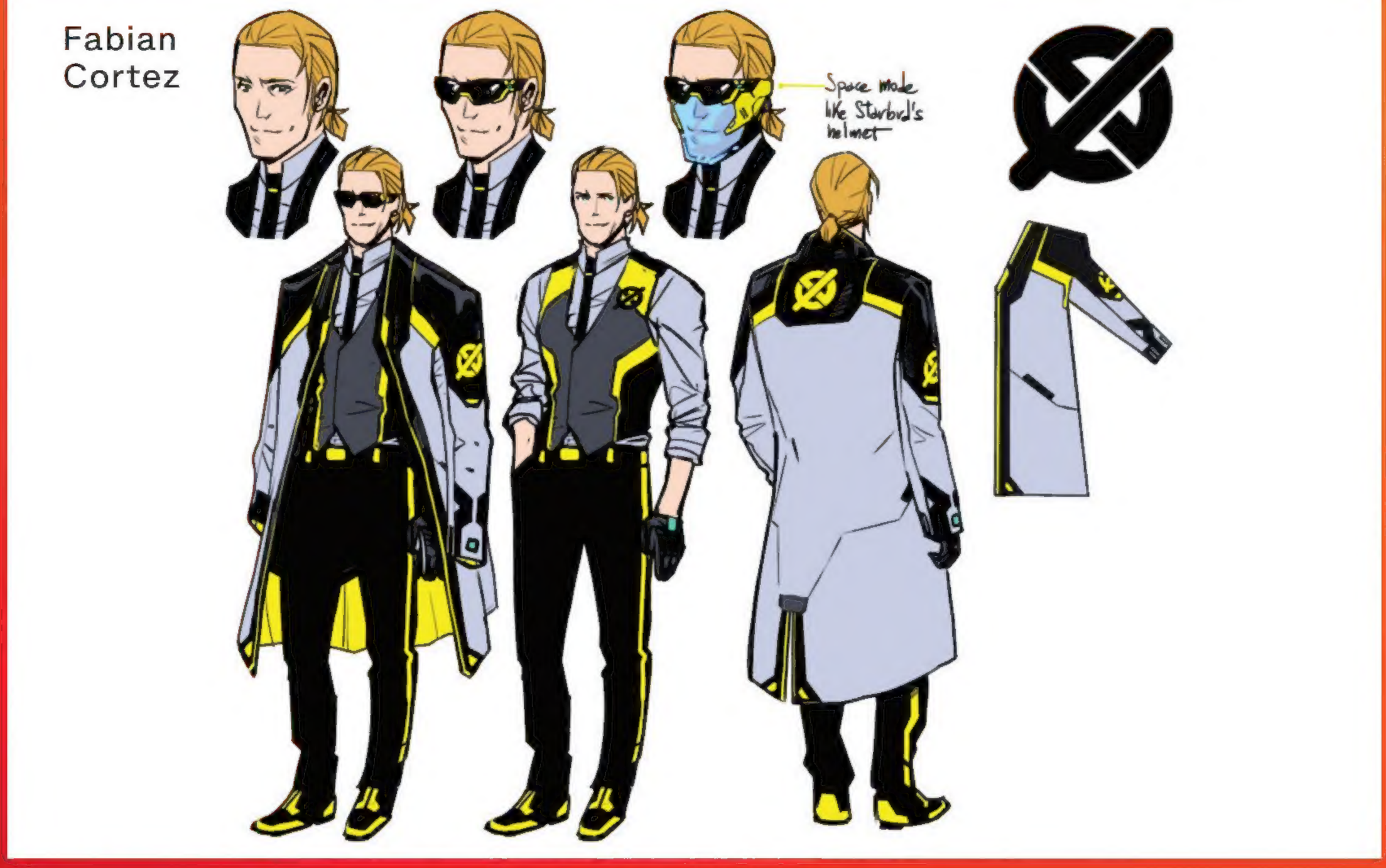
Wiz-Kid

Xavier's chair from the 90s

Space Mode

Two earrings + dyed hair

S.W.O.R.D. Character Designs by Valerio Schiti



S.W.O.R.D. Character Designs by Valerio Schiti

Storm Costume Design by Russell Dauterman

“This is what comes next.”
— Abigail Brand

Al Ewing (*Immortal Hulk*) is a writer known for big ideas — and they don’t come bigger than his contributions to the X-Men’s Krakoan era! From relaunching S.W.O.R.D., with Commander Abigail Brand at the helm, and establishing the mutant colony on Mars to imagining Storm’s New Brotherhood deep into a Sinister future and bringing Magneto back from the dead, all of Ewing’s mutant epics are collected in one star-spanning volume!

Collecting:
S.W.O.R.D. (2020) #1–11
X-Men Red (2022) #1–18
Storm & the Brotherhood of Mutants #1–3
Resurrection of Magneto #1–4
Cable Reloaded #1
X-Men: Before the Fall –
Heralds of Apocalypse #1
And material from:
Marvel’s Voices: X-Men #1

By:
Al Ewing, Valerio Schiti, Stefano Caselli, Guiu Vilanova, Jacopo Camagni, Madibek Musabekov, Yildiray Çinar, Paco Medina, Andrea Di Vito, Alessandro Vitti, Luciano Vecchio, Bob Quinn, Marte Gracia, Fernando Sifuentes-Sujo, Protobunker Studio, Federico Blee, Jay David Ramos, Rain Beredo, David Curiel, Jesus Aburtov, Javier Tartaglia, Ceci de la Cruz and more.

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